WARHAMMER 40,000

ARKS OF OMEN

ABADDON

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INTRODUCTION

The galaxy burns. From the far-flung worlds of the Uhulis Sector to the nightmarish Ghoul Stars, from lonely Repentance to the bloodied systems of Scarus, war rages upon every world. Since the emergence of the Great Rift, countless systems and species have been plunged into desperate conflict like never before. The hour is as dark as it has ever been.

Welcome to *Arks of Omen: Abaddon*, the first in a galaxy-spanning series of spectacular narrative campaign books set amidst the anarchy and bloodshed of the 41st Millennium. This is a story on a grand scale, a tale starring some of the greatest warriors and warlords of the Warhammer 40,000 setting.

Within the pages that follow you will read about moments of desperate sacrifice and devious cruelty, whose repercussions will shake the galaxy to its foundations. Colossal war engines take to the void, accompanied by diabolical fleets of heretical raiders and renegades hell-bent on destruction. Some bring the scourge of invasion and utter devastation to luckless worlds. Others themselves become claustrophobic battlegrounds where death-or-glory boarding actions rage, and where precious victory or bloody defeat rest upon a knife's edge.

A nightmarish entity steps from the depths of the warp to join the battle for realspace, himself but the first herald of shocking revelations and galaxy-shaking cataclysms to come. Meanwhile, old hatreds rule and dark legends are unleashed once more upon the stars, to the potential ruin of all.

At the heart of the raging storm stands Abaddon the Despoiler, master of the innumerable hosts of Chaos. Here begins his quest for a weapon of ultimate and unstoppable power that will finally and decisively turn the tides of the Long War in his favour. Dread new allies gather to the Despoiler's banner in this latest onslaught against his galaxy of foes, while grim-faced lords of battle step forth to defy him. And above them all – around them all, booming like unholy thunder through the warp – the laughter of the thirsting gods echoes ever on…

Within this book, you will find the rules that form the basis of a whole new way to enjoy playing Warhammer 40,000, in the form of Boarding Actions. These ferocious clashes take place amidst the dark depths of ancient void craft, where close-quarters combat is fast and deadly. Within the maze-like hearts of these huge vessels, warriors battle to the death to seize critical assets and thwart the designs of their foes.

The rules you will find in this publication are supplementary to the Warhammer 40,000 Core Book and will describe how to form a Boarding Patrol from your collection of Citadel miniatures, along with how they move and fight through the corridors and hatchways of these vessels. Also presented are the first nine missions of this new way to play, capturing the unique experiences offered by these lethal close confines.

The galaxy writhes like a wounded beast. Tormented by the infected sores of countless warp storms, it laments in agony. While the forces of the Imperium Sanctus fight tooth and nail to regain control, the worlds of the Imperium Nihilus endure besiegement by nightmares uncounted. The forces of Chaos attack on every front, from the Nachmund Gauntlet to the Charadon Sector. Alien races battle furiously for survival, or rampage across the stars in orgies of conquest and destruction.

Yet no one faction can truly gain mastery. Every victory and defeat only sees the inferno rage hotter. Abaddon the Despoiler has not laboured for thousands of years to see his Long War end in mutual annihilation. His Hands move unseen through the shadows on secret and diabolical missions. His legions of Sorcerers and cryptomagi pore over every shred of arcane lore and prophetic utterance ever gathered, hunting for some esoteric advantage that will allow the Warmaster to seize decisive control of the conflict. Abaddon desires a secret weapon to unleash upon the Imperium of Man, and he will tear apart time and space if he must to secure it.

In my dreams the sky is burning. The stars blaze bright enough to drown out the darkness around. My heart leaps to see their lights, and I weep to feel such hope.

Then the stars start to die.

Faltering.

Guttering.

One by one they burn away and crumble to ash that falls thick as snow. It lands upon my upturned face. It mingles with my tears. My hope has turned to horror, and as I drag my fingers down my cheeks, they trail smears of darkness that scald my skin.

I sink to my knees amidst the ashes. I know that this is the end.

Of me.

Of everything.

Yet in that moment I am seized by sudden knowledge. Revelation. I can stop this! I tear my gaze from the dying heavens and I dig, terrified that I am already too late. Something lies under the ashes. Something has been hidden deep, something with the power to stop the stars from burning out.

My clawing fingers uncover a pattern in the ashes. I see the suggestion of furnaces and screaming mouths, of chains, of hammers. At their heart stands a figure with eyes of burning cinder. It turns.

Terror grips me and I dig.

There's another pattern sitting below the first. A fortress, vast and mighty, but gouged by the beasts raging about its walls. Again the cinders dance before my eyes, racing across the ashen bastion like cracks. Just before the image shatters those glowing lines of cinders form the shape of a crimson giant.

Above me the stars die, and die, and die.

I dig.

I see an ashen forest grow, and wither, and grow again.

I see an ancient knight kneel upon his field of victory and weep cinder tears.

I see a circle, within a circle, within a circle, inward and inward until at their heart... nothing.

The light grows faint and still I dig. I cannot be too late.

And then at last I have it. The key is an ugly thing of brass and bone and rock. Its rusted surface is hot, burns my bleeding fingers. I cannot care. I must end this.

But a key must have a lock.

Even as the dream begins to fade I feel my gaze dragged back to the hollow skies above. I don't want to look, but I must.

So few stars remain, and as they swirl together they become a single searing point so bright it hurts my eyes. I know that I have found the keyhole. Yet even as my shaking hand raises the key on high I am gripped by a different fear.

What has been imprisoned?

What will I unleash?

My doubts redouble and I feel suddenly as though I am being used. But now the dream has me and I cannot resist.

The key slides into a lock that blazes with the light of dying stars.

It turns, and flames engulf me.

I wake screaming, nails torn from swollen fingers, bloody tears streaking my face. Sometimes, if I am lucky, it is days before I dream again.

But I always dream again.

Abaddon the Despoiler stood within an occultarium near the Vengeful Spirit's *heart*. Small and circular, the chamber had walls that rose high into the shadows above Abaddon's head. Coupled with the polished black stone cladding every surface, it gave him the feeling of standing at the bottom of a deep well. The chamber's door was rune-locked – a precaution against anything malign escaping. The only light was the crimson glow rising from the neon octagram that spanned the chamber's floor. It limned the barest hint of chains, hung with gory fetishes, festooning the distant ceiling. It also underlit cadaverous entities shrouded in mouldering robes, bound with rune-warded straps and wired securely into alcoves around the chamber's edge. These were the Oracles, dead things that murmured and hissed, their papery exhalations barely audible. So infused with the energies of the warp were these infernal revenants that their eyeless gaze would have pinned even the most hardened Sorcerer in place. Abaddon, by comparison, felt little but scorn.

'Always the pantomime, the lust to be feared. I have no time for it. You know what I desire. Show me.'

The Oracles shivered in their alcoves, outlines blurring as they convulsed then were still. The light from the octagram flared. Images swam, then resolved in its glare: barbaric warriors steeped in blood; worlds aflame; cities drowned in darkness. Abaddon watched, his face a stony mask even as his temper paced within him like a caged beast.

'Too long away from war,' he murmured. 'Too long staring at star charts inked onto dead men's flesh, listening to the mumbling of seers and mystics.'

He gestured to one of the images and it swam to the fore. Somewhere on the edge of hearing, damned howls rose in agonised threnody. In the infernal glare, Abaddon watched stars wheel and warp storms consume them. A clenched gauntlet resolved before him. The fury of the storms coiled about it, flensing away layers of metal until the gauntlet became brittle and covered in spreading darkness. A jagged spear burst suddenly out through its palm. The armoured fingers spasmed open then broke off and whirled away into the maelstrom. Abaddon gestured in irritation and the image subsided.

'I know already that my Worldclaimer prevails within the Nachmund Gauntlet. I have no use for obsequience. S*how* me.'

The images whirled again. As they did, Abaddon allowed himself a moment of envy for Worldclaimer's task. To lead such a straightforward campaign of destruction and bathe Drach'nyen in loyalist blood would have done much to soothe his ire. Yet he could not permit himself such indulgences. He knew there were those amongst his followers who questioned why he had not simply struck out for Terra already, employed the darkness of the Noctis Aeterna to launch his killing strike or hurled all his forces along the Crimson Path while the loyalists reeled.

The answer was not complicated; Abaddon was not the fool Horus had been. To risk the vagaries of the warp, to bank upon the whims of the Dark Gods, to race for his prize and leave vast armies of corpse-worshippers unfought at his back while he did, would be to repeat past mistakes. Abaddon did not see himself as the gambler he believed Horus to have been.

He did not suffer the innate arrogance that was the inheritance of every Primarch.

'When I strike at Terra it will be from a position of absolute strength.' He spoke aloud to the empty chamber, as solemn as though he swore a holy vow. 'I will offer them neither battle nor siege. There will be only the fall of the headsman's axe – certain, final and singular.'

E*asier said than done*, he reflected, when one commanded such anarchic hosts as his. Even to use such terms as 'command' stretched the truth to breaking point. The hordes claiming to follow Abaddon's banner might be without number, but their agendas were myriad and often aligned with his only through fear or self-interest. Worse, behind so many of the champions and warbands, the dark magi and towering god-machines, lurked the influence of the Dark Gods.

Abaddon had sworn millennia before that he would not be their pawn. Yet resisting the gods' influence himself was not the same as keeping his followers free of their taint. The Gods of Chaos did not wish to see their greatest mortal champion win victory without being forced to beg their aid, nor for him to prevail while in thrall to any of their infernal rivals.

Thus the very entities whose power and patronage should have seen Abaddon's victory assured instead warred and politicked through the medium of mortal and infernal puppets alike. Their influence sowed internecine conflict through the hosts he sought to command.

Another image shimmered before Abaddon, of two godlike figures battling atop a burning tower. One raised glinting talons and felled the other as the sky above flared with baleful light. Abaddon's lip curled. More meaningless flattery, mingled with sly mockery. His battle with Marneus Calgar on Vigilus had been a satisfying clash of arms, yet in the end its symbolic value had been

undermined thanks to the meddling of xenos filth. Even now, long after he had reclaimed the *Vengeful Spirit*, the dark magi and Warpsmiths aboard had not finished repairing all the damage done to the Black Legion flagship.

Abaddon snarled and swiped the image away. His gesture caused a collective shudder to pass through the robed dead. He would not be taunted thus. To fight this Long War, to yoke the power of the Dark Gods and their worshippers through sheer force of will without ever falling into the clutches of one empyric deity or another, was the hardest and loneliest road a mortal could walk. Always he had to reassert his authority through personal conquests and shows of strength, even while unable to spare the time to do so.

Abaddon dragged another shuddering image to the fore then swept it away before selecting another, then another. He saw a crimson cyclops atop a glimmering spire, an endless train of supplicants walking a narrowing spiral to step willingly into the flames at his feet. He watched an ocean of rotted filth crashing against a bastion of marble, blue and gold, while a hooded figure loomed over the scene with an hourglass clutched in one bony hand.

Another image showed him a smothering shroud cast across a mass of screaming faces and clawing hands, dragging them down into a still black lake. That image came again and again, proliferating about the edges of the shimmering starfield until Abaddon swept it away. He was well aware of the Necrons and their king unspeaking, and had yet to decide how to respond to the threat they posed.

More images darted before his eyes, allegories and nightmare symbolism unable to hide their truths from one so ancient and cunning as he. Abaddon saw victories for the hosts of Chaos, but he saw defeats also, and always the damnable infighting. Upon catching sight of Fulgrim's latest indulgence deep in the Imperium Nihilus he roared aloud in rage, and had to restrain himself from bringing his clenched talons down upon the octagram at his feet.

'Show me the corpse-worshippers,' he said, forcing the words between clenched teeth. Another series of lashing convulsions ran through the dead things in their alcoves, their outlines blurring, their mummified heels drumming against stone.

New images unfolded before Abaddon, of rivers of fire flowing outward from a blinding star, of two-headed eagles tearing down spiked towers with their talons and of shadows driven back by scouring light. He saw legions of faceless figures marching in lockstep. Their eyes were downcast, their footfalls weary as they trampled across the backs of their own fallen. Yet each figure's brows glinted with a reflected spark of the firelight at their backs and Abaddon sensed the unity of purpose and faith that drove these legions of drudges ever onward. How he hated them for their mindless devotion. That the faith they clove to was a lie only made its very efficacy more repugnant to him.

He was about to swipe at the images again, to focus in upon those war zones that most deserved his attention, when the hellish light flickered and the images within it skewed grotesquely. A shock wave of mingled anger and panic hit Abaddon like a physical blow. His hearts thumped with battle readiness even as he recognised the emotions were projections not his own. He looked up to see the Oracles thrashing in their alcoves. They emitted dry rasps, like dead reeds rattling in a storm wind. Arcs of poisonous green energy whipped off their bodies like solar flares and crawled over the walls. The glow of the octagram died, even as runic wards hidden within the walls flared to furious life.

Abaddon raised Drach'nyen, adopting a fighting stance. Surrounded by desperate hissing, bludgeoned by waves of inhuman emotion, he backed up to the door and thumped an elbow against its unlocking rune. His first attempt elicited nothing but a sputter of sparks, but Abaddon repeated the action and this time the door lurched upwards. Thankful he had not been forced to turn his back upon whatever malevolence had so disrupted the occultarium, Abaddon backed out into the corridor beyond. At once, warriors clad in the heavy plate of Terminator armour thumped forward to flank him. At their head was the monstrous figure of Falkus Kibre, leader of Abaddon's bodyguards, the Bringers of Despair.

'Warmaster?' asked Kibre.

'Something interferes with the Oracles,' said Abaddon. 'Have the occultarium sealed and its contents destroyed. I will brook no malign intrusion.'

'It will be as you say, Lord, but I am receiving reports from across the ship. Whatever this is – it is widespread.'

Abaddon had quieted his gorget vox upon entering the occultarium. Now he roused it again, frowning at the background disruption fouling the signal. Oddly industrial sounds ghosted at the edges of each channel, hissing and clanking noises mingling with screams that sounded as though they echoed up from some deep and distant abyss. He swore that he could hear the grinding of cogs, the remote bellowing of flames. Amidst the disruption, he caught snatches of vox exchanges and picked out the bass growls of Black Legionnaires, the static-laced blare of dark magi, and the panicked voices of crew helots.

'...of the servitors on... acting strangely, ignoring their... something wrong with their augmetics...'

'...gunnery crews to... unknown signatures...'

'...three of them melding into one another... forming repeating fractal patterns... what...'

'...every panel has altered its display to... same geometric pattern...'

'...in the name of...Dark Gods, there's something... every time the lumen flicker... silver filaments...'

'...as though the spirit of the ship were in pain...'

Abaddon glared at Kibre, then keyed his vox to a ship-wide address.

'This is the Warmaster. What is happening to my ship? Is this an attack? Find me answers, not the bleating of frightened beasts.'

Leaving the link open, he turned and strode off down the corridor in the direction of the *Vengeful Spirit*'s bridge. He issued no orders for the defence of the craft; his Legionnaires would know what he expected of them without requiring his direction. Even as his bodyguards followed him, a knot of dark magi in rubberised black robes hastened to seal off the occultarium and its still-hissing occupants.

As he walked, Abaddon saw evidence of the strange infestation for himself. Here, the lumen pulsed in maddening patterns, each flare accompanied by movement in his peripheral vision that was gone the moment he looked. There, biomechanical mutant growths recoiled from overhead pipes and nests of cabling as though the touch of these mechanical components burned them. And then there were the filaments of silver and brass, a few at first but growing in number, that writhed through the walls, ceilings and floors like metallic worms. Contorted daemonic visages shrank back before them, twisted entities that had long haunted the corridors of the *Vengeful Spirit* seeming to flee the touch of these inorganic nematodes. Abaddon paused to watch in consternation as a knot of the things swarmed through a bulkhead and, in their wake, thin needles of metal sprouted like the spines of some mechanical mutant. Even as he watched each spine seemed to blossom, folding outward and becoming fine brass cogs that meshed perfectly before whirring into motion.

'What is this?' Abaddon breathed.

He pressed on, past knots of dark magi engaged in frantic rituals as they attempted to determine what was happening and halt it. Daemonic entities caged within ritual chambers hurled themselves against their wards, howling as silvery filaments slithered about them. Bands of Black Legionnaires pounded past, making for key defensive points should the vessel be boarded.

When a voice crackled again from Abaddon's vox, he was forced to magnify its volume to make out the words.

'...lord, this is Xorphas... the... of Diamor...'

'I do not require your list of titles, Sorcerer,' snarled Abaddon.

'No... ord... apologies... have determined the epicentre of... phenomena. The empyric... emanating from for'ard reserve sensorium...'

'Rendezvous with me there, Xorphas. Bring Legionnaires.'

Abaddon dismissed the link and strode on, his mind awhirl. If his vessel was under some manner of sorcerous assault, he would sever it at its source, and whoever was responsible would pay.

Lord Xorphas met Abaddon and his retinue in the brazier-lit corridor that twisted down to access the forward reserve sensorium. The Sorcerer had his blade drawn, and a handful of his own Chosen awaiting his word. Abaddon swept past them without acknowledgement and they fell hastily into step behind him. His eyes darted about the corridor as he marched along it, noting that dozens, perhaps hundreds, of silver and copper worms infested it. From the chamber ahead there welled a fiery glow, while a sound somewhere between crackling static and Human screams echoed through the sensorium's open doorway.

Abaddon stepped through the doorway and took in the bizarre sight beyond. The chamber, it seemed, had been one of the worst-damaged spaces remaining aboard the *Vengeful Spirit*. Rents in the walls and still-blackened deck plates suggested as much. Perhaps that was why the magi had chosen to stage their ritual there. What mattered was some sub-sect of dark magi clearly had attempted a ritual, and a glance told him that the results had not been what they expected.

A complex runic device had been etched into the damaged deck plates, forming a summoning circle that had then been ringed with archaic-looking pieces of technology. An intricately tooled brass pillar had been placed near the circle and festooned with black iron thuribles and fetishes of braided wire and cogs. Open atop this carefully crafted lectern was a heavy data-tome, the silvery glare spilling from its static-laced pages.

Within the circle coiled an immense mass of the metallic filaments, hovering several feet above the ground and twisting over and around

and through one another. Masses of them extruded like braided tendrils, spilling over the edges of the circle that had clearly been meant to contain them and plunging into the walls, floor and ceiling. Here was the source of the infestation, and here too its unwitting architects. The magi had turned to stare in horror as Abaddon, his bodyguard of Terminators and the horn-helmed Xorphas with his own retinue emerged from the doorway to fill up half the room. Now the twisted tech-adepts emitted scrapcode-laced wails and prostrated themselves as best they could. Mechatendrils waved over their hunched forms. Eye lenses glowed from beneath tattered cowls as flesh-mouths twisted in fear.

'Lord Warmaster, we sought only to expedite the repairs to your great vessel!' wheedled the nearest magos, whose robes and augmetics were more elaborate than his fellows.

'You were the ringleader of this idiocy?'

The magos cringed at Abaddon's tone and croaked out artificial barks of static as though unable to articulate through his fear.

'Xorphas?' asked Abaddon.

'Lord, without studying that data-tome I cannot tell you what these fools have done,' said the Sorcerer, whom Abaddon noted sounded more fascinated than alarmed. 'I can tell you that I have never seen anything of the like, and that I sense the energies of this place flowing chiefly towards the bridge. I cannot argue that these... worms... do seem to be effecting repairs of a sort to the vessel, but I would not trust their nature.'

Abaddon glanced down at the magos, who returned his glare with the forlorn hope of the condemned.

'Kibre, take these vermin away for excruciation. Find out everything they know of what is happening, then communicate to them the full depths of my displeasure.'

Ignoring the magi's pleas for mercy, Abaddon swept from the chamber, Xorphas following a pace behind. The Sorcerer had paused just long enough to snatch the data-tome from its plinth. Now he hastened in Abaddon's wake, trying to leaf through its contents as he did.

Up a coiling stairway, along a steep corridor where more silver worms slithered, then up another, more ornate iron stair strode Abaddon. Only through force of will did he prevent himself from running. Whatever those fools had unleashed, its attentions were focused upon the bridge of the *Vengeful Spirit*, and if it had compromised his flagship…

Passing through the great dark portal leading to the bridge, Abaddon halted so suddenly that Xorphas almost walked into him. Looking up from the data-tome, the Sorcerer's exclamation of surprise died even as it left his vox-grille. Around them, Xorphas' Chosen stepped forward with guns raised and blades drawn. For his part, Abaddon simply stared, fascinated despite himself as he attempted to make sense of the strange spectacle unfolding before him.

Tendrils of wire, molten metal and crackling energy spilled from every single mechanical system upon the bridge. They slithered through the air like the myriad strands of a colossal mechanical spider's web, and meshed at the heart of the ancient space. Servitors and crew-helots that had melded with their stations millennia before convulsed and rose, tearing loose from their bondage amidst drizzling vitae. Shambling on atrophied limbs, dragging themselves with data-spike stumps, trailing tubes and cables like spilled intestines, they converged upon the growing mass of entangled metal and energy. One by one the bizarre supplicants cast themselves into the maelstrom of slithering strands and were torn to shreds. Their blood spattered runic control consoles and stained the writhing mass of metal arterial red.

Abaddon took a step forward, Drach'nyen raised and the order to open fire on the tip of his tongue. Xorphas' were far from the only Black Legionnaires upon the bridge of the *Vengeful Spirit*. At his command, Abaddon could unleash a firestorm upon this grotesque manifestation.

He could not say what stopped him in that moment. Some presentiment of destiny, perhaps, or simply the deep-buried hope that whatever entity was invading his vessel would provide him with an outlet for the violence he had bottled up for too long.

Static swelled to a roar from vox-grilles and speakers, shot through with stuttering binharic cant and the squeal of overlapping vox channels. The whirling mass of metal and energy and blood collapsed upon itself like a singularity and furnace-light bloomed through the bridge. Abaddon squinted against the glare, snarling as he saw a tall humanoid figure resolve from amidst it. Trailing streamers of steam and arcing skeins of energy, an entity of living iron and molten steel set first one cloven hoof upon the decking, then the other. It fixed him with the burning lamps of its eyes, and spoke in a voice of rasping static from every emitter on the bridge.

'Abaddon the Despoiler. I am Vashtorr the Arkifane, and I come to make you an offer.'

'The denizens of the warp are not our allies. They are not patrons to us, and they will never grant us the boons we seek. Their nature is the same as that of their duplicitous realm, perilous to credulous fools but a potent resource for those with the willpower to take without giving in return. My will has endured for ten thousand years, even in the face of the Dark Gods themselves. And I am no fool…'

- Abaddon the Despoiler,
Warmaster of the Imperium Nihilus

++ IF CURIOSITY BE THE SEED, THEN DAMNATION IS ITS ONLY CROP ++

THE COMING OF VASHTORR

Even as Abaddon led his forces against Vigilus, other traitor warbands had struck at the systems and worlds around it. One such assault was led by Warpsmith Vask against the Adeptus Mechanicus data-sanctum of Pergamatros. It was this onslaught that would lead, months later, to the manifestation of Vashtorr the Arkifane upon the bridge of the *Vengeful Spirit*.

Pergamatros was an artificial moon, orbiting the gas giant Pelucidus. It was maintained in utmost secrecy by the magi of forge world Goralech, whose patronage by a cabal of Ordo Malleus Inquisitors had seen them handle the darkest of proscribed lore. The vaults of Pergamatros were created to contain Goralech's perilous data, hidden behind arrays of auspicatory baffles that concealed the moon from even the most powerful sensor sweeps.

Disaster began with minute power surges. For years they pulsed their slow and secret rhythm through a power conduit in one of Pergamatros' deepest service tunnels. So gradually was the damage caused that it went unnoticed until, behind the inspection hatch, the affected wires were laid bare and frayed as their sanctified plastek sheaths melted. When the next surge triggered a maintenance clarion, the servitor that responded was itself in poor condition. A recursive glitch had developed in its cerebral subroutines, resisting all attempts by the Magi Chiralitus to exorcise it. Though slated for dismemberment and component-harvest, the servitor's defects had been judged minor

enough that it could continue in its duties for another few days. Thus, as the defective servitor stretched out its manipulator claws and opened the inspection hatch in the remote tunnel, its glitch struck again. The cyborg's right claw juddered, slamming against a knot of coolant pipes that – gradually corroded from within by fluids a minute degree too acidic –now hid a fatal defect, and ruptured under the seemingly chance impact of the servitor's claw.

A pressurised jet of coolant fluid erupted from the shattered pipe, drenching both servitor and wires. Motive force leapt, arced, set a flame within the flesh of the servitor even as it surged back into the conduit and raced away like a tidal bore. It took eleven minutes for an emergency response maniple to reach the site of the malfunction, and a further four for them to cut away enough of the burned mass that was once a servitor to reach the inspection hatch. By then, the overload had done its malicious work.

Had the secondary auspicator baffles not registered an hour earlier that they required urgent maintenance, then they would not have been shut down. Yet they had and were. When the rogue power surge blew out anointed circuitry throughout the primary array, there was no reserve system to take up the slack. Acting with alacrity, senior magi successfully reawoke the secondary baffles, but the damage was done. For five minutes and fifteen seconds, Pergamatros' existence was revealed to any auspicator array looking. And, of course, the augurs of the Black Legion warship *Unrepentant* had been just so directed mere moments earlier, after their helot operators detected partial sensor-gheist returns and re-aligned to chase them. The *Unrepentant* saw all, a perfect datacapture of Pergamatros' location, nature, and hints of the wealth of data it concealed.

ABADDON'S WILL

Pergamatros was no soft target. Defence lasers covered every approach to the artificial moon. Void shields and feet-thick adamantine armour sheathed its surface. Legions of Skitarii stood ready to fight to the death for every strongpoint on its surface, and every stairwell and data-canyon below it. A maniple of Reaver Titans of the Legio Maledictus waited to repel invaders.

Yet Warpsmith Vask knew all this, thanks to the remarkable clarity of the augury received by the *Unrepentant*. His force was accordingly substantial, Black Legionnaires supported by the renegade warbands of the Voidmaws and Worms of Agony. The ghoulish Dark Magos Persephora Hexxen led her own cohorts of magi and mutant combat servitors in support of Vask's forces, the Dark Mechanicum supplying dozens of war engines and macabre warships.

What followed was a desperate but ultimately one-sided battle. After their defence silos were hammered from orbit and their shield generators suffered mysterious failures, the loyalist forces were brought to battle by waves of traitor invaders landing at both of Pergamatros' poles. Even as packs of war engines driven by abominable intellects dragged down the Reaver Titans, the Black Legionnaires and their allies drove the Skitarii back. The raid was not without cost, for the scions of the Adeptus Mechanicus fought with fanatical desperation. Yet they could not prevent kill teams of Black Legionnaires and dark magi from breaching the surface hatches and pressing down into the data-canyons below.

It was in the last hours of the battle that a malfunctioning autodoor sealed Magos Minoris Juregg inside a long-disused data-vault. One of many lesser dark magi charged with rooting out Pergamatros' secrets for their masters, he had crept away from his comrades, following an odd warp signature that only he seemed to have detected. Even as his attendant clade of kill-servitors battered at the malfunctioning door to release him, Juregg had looked around the dusty vault and spotted a repository shrine deep in its shadows. It was the work of moments for one of his forbidden learning to unbind the runic wards chaining the shrine closed.

By the time his cyborg attendants ripped the door apart and reached his side, Juregg in turn had liberated the baroque data-tome that had been sealed within the shrine. Upon touching it, his augmetic senses shivered with a susurrus of static-voices, promising knowledge and power beyond his wildest hopes. Juregg knew that his master would soon be returning to Abaddon's side, and he to his role as one of countless maintenance drudges aboard the *Vengeful Spirit*. He resolved then and there to decipher the secrets of the power hidden in this tome, and to use them in order to win the Despoiler's favour with some cunning display of power. So did Juregg smuggle the data-tome up from the depths of Pergamatros and thence onto the *Vengeful Spirit*, just as Vashtorr the Arkifane had always intended…

A MEETING OF MONSTERS

Who can say how the fate of the galaxy might have been altered, had Abaddon been a

VASHTORR THE ARKIFANE

MASTER OF THE SOUL FORGES, THE GOD IN THE MACHINE

Vashtorr is the daemonic demigod of inventors, engineers, scientists and artisans. He is curiosity and innovation shorn of moral conscience and driven to its darkest extremes. Empowered by the inquiring of mortal minds, Vashtorr embodies the need to understand and then to enslave natural forces, and to eventually achieve technological apotheosis at any cost.

Few mortal savants of any race know of Vashtorr the Arkifane, for he has manifested only sparingly across the long history of the galaxy. Why this should be is unclear, but it has made him a seldom-glimpsed figure of fear, a techno-daemonic bogeyman whose occasional appearances always herald nightmarish catastrophe. Some cryptoscholars have claimed that Vashtorr was created amidst the reckless arms race of some ancient and galaxy-spanning war. Others posit that he was birthed into the warp by the horrors of the Dark Age of Technology, or conversely that he was the author and patron of those horrors.

However Vashtorr came to be, he is neither a Daemon Prince nor an entity of one of the four great Dark Gods. He has his own sphere of influence, and his own unique role within the wider pantheon of the warp; he is the master of the soul forges. This colossal metaphysical foundry is a realm of dark iron and steam, of clattering cogs and pounding pistons wherein infernal pacts are sworn and grotesque transformations effected. Any daemon may approach the essence brokers of the forges and enter into a pact with them. Some do so seeing a swift route to martial might, thence into the favour of their patron deity. Others seek to circumvent the spiritual bonds and lingering shame of banishment. Whatever each entity's reasons, Vashtorr and his brokers are only too glad to forge a binding contract. In exchange for an agreed price of mortal souls reaped and offered up to the soul forges, the entity is fed into the machines and transformed into a grotesque melding of war engine and daemon such as a Soul Grinder, a Calamity Engine or an Infernal Bombard. Other daemons, less desperate or with less to offer the forges, are simply enslaved to Vashtorr's will for a time, melding torturously with unholy machineries and joining the ranks of his indentured hosts. Such daemons' bonds are shown by a collar, manacle, ritual chain or bodily mechanistic melding that becomes part of their manifested forms while they remain indebted.

Unlike other daemons, it is not in Vashtorr's nature to lie or trick. His contracts are explicit in their conditions. Instead he leaves it to the monomaniacal nature of the daemons themselves to entrap them in his service, for with every defeat an indentured entity suffers, so its soul-debt increases; few indeed are the daemons that have ever escaped their self-inflicted bondage. Meanwhile, the usefulness of the forges' grotesque war engines to the daemon legions, coupled with the danger of being the only deity to lose Vashtorr's allegiance, keeps the Dark Gods' reprisals at bay. He is the arms dealer of the Great Game, an agent of no single power yet precarious ally to all.

Quite aside from the infernal hosts he can summon to fight for him, Vashtorr is himself a frighteningly powerful entity. Whether reordering the mechanisms of reality to his will, or soaring across the battlefields of realspace amidst storms of empyric lightning, the Arkifane is a demigod of dark artifice and technology. He is a daemon of ordered and meticulous evil, whose will is as inexorable as the churning gears of some great and unstoppable machine.

WARMASTER

Abaddon the Despoiler was once First Captain to Horus, the Primarch of the Luna Wolves and architect of the great Heresy. Yet Horus' failure to achieve victory in that war left a deep mark upon Abaddon. He came to despise his gene-sire, and resolved neither to venerate Horus' memory nor to emulate him in any way. So, for the longest time, did Abaddon eschew the use of Horus' title of Warmaster as being tainted by his father's failure. It was not until the successes of his Thirteenth Black Crusade that Abaddon at last considered the time right to resurrect the honorific and make it his own. No longer would the Warmaster be the great general and champion of the Dark Gods, ruling nothing he had not bargained for with inhuman entities. Instead, Abaddon declared his title to be Warmaster of the Imperium Nihilus, master of the sundered half of Humanity's realm that was, he said, far more than Horus ever conquered and held.

little quicker to attack this daemonic intruder? Yet as the tense seconds drew out and the bridge of the *Vengeful Spirit* did not dissolve into a battleground, so fate forged a different path. Rather than take his talon to the demigod that towered over him, Abaddon instead drew breath and spoke. The Warmaster demanded to know who Vashtorr was, which of the Dark Gods this entity served and what it had done to his ship. As an afterthought, he asked also how a band of cultists came to have accidentally summoned Vashtorr so spectacularly through the veil.

Abaddon expected riddles and dissembling in answer to his questions. It was his experience that any daemon not inclined to immediate aggression was instead likely to attempt some trick or else work to seed corruption. He had dealt with such duplicitous entities as Be'lakor, after all, and many other daemons besides. Each had believed themselves far more cunning than any mortal. Abaddon was therefore surprised when Vashtorr answered with what seemed – at least on the surface – to be frank candour.

The daemon proclaimed itself as the ruler of the soul forges and spat upon the notion that it was the servant of any other deity. The vehemence with which this denial was delivered intrigued Abaddon. He heard in it an echo of his own resistance towards bending the knee to the Dark Gods. Despite himself, he felt his distrust of this strange daemon begin to wane.

Regarding the strange manifestations occurring throughout the *Vengeful Spirit*, Vashtorr bade Abaddon consider them a gift given in good faith. The daemon made neither secret of nor apology for the fact that, had it wished to turn the mechanisms of the warship against Abaddon and his followers, it could have done so. Instead, repairs, and even improvements, were being effected with supernatural swiftness.

Abaddon paused their uneasy exchange to seek confirmation of these claims over vox channels that Vashtorr had now swept clear of distortion. Sure enough, bewildered dark magi and Warpsmiths corroborated the daemon's words. Though some daemonic entities had been banished from their long possession of regions of the ship, the orderly biomechanical systems that had sprouted in their wake appeared far more efficient. Still distrustful, and commanding his most skilled Sorcerers to inspect every inch of the ship for any sign of Vashtorr's duplicity, Abaddon motioned for the daemon to continue.

The cultists, Vashtorr explained, were nothing but cogs within his endless artifice. They, and all the events that had fallen into place around them, had been a trifling example of the power he could exert over the mechanisms of reality. Abaddon was angered by the daemon's inference, replying bluntly that he had managed for ten thousand years not to bend his knee to any of the Dark Gods. He was unlikely now to be tricked into kneeling before what he sneeringly called the 'God of Cogitators'. He was surprised when Vashtorr appeared amused by this response.

The daemon stated no desire to trick or entrap Abaddon, explaining instead that he sought a mutually beneficial alliance. Vashtorr knew of Abaddon's hunt for the crucial fragment of lore or prophecy that would lead him to a weapon of fate-changing power. In fact, Vashtorr explained, Abaddon's scholars had already found the answer, though they had not recognised it for what it was.

At once, every screen and imager on the bridge flickered and began to display words of prophecy that unspooled across them before repeating again.

'In my dreams the sky is burning. The stars blaze bright enough to drown out the darkness…'

On the fateful words went, and then around and on again, endlessly repeating. Here was the prophecy Abaddon sought, and Vashtorr claimed to be able to interpret its words, and to ally his legions to Abaddon's so as to force its events to unfold to their mutual benefit. Now the Warmaster was more suspicious than ever, listening for any hint of blandishment or seemingly trifling condition to the offered deal.

Instead, Vashtorr stated his aims outright, and the scope and ambition of them impressed even the Warmaster. Already a demigod in the warp, Vashtorr wanted more. He sought true apotheosis, to become a fifth Dark God and to join the Great Game in earnest. It was Vashtorr's belief that his path to ultimate divinity lay in the fulfilment of the prophecy. He was more than willing to aid Abaddon in his own Long War in order to achieve that end.

Abaddon remained unconvinced, for he had heard nothing from this daemon but words and grand claims. Unfazed, Vashtorr urged Abaddon to assemble as large a warband as he saw fit, and to accompany him to the nearby world of Magdalor. There, Vashtorr claimed, Abaddon would see the value of their alliance, as well as recovering what the daemon enigmatically described as the next fragment of the key.

Confident that he could crush his would-be ally should he prove false, the Warmaster agreed at least to this much. Caution had its place, he reflected, but in the end victory belonged to the bold.

ANGELS OF MAGDALOR

The Iron Angels Space Marine Chapter had claimed the planet of Magdalor in early M33 after a catastrophe destroyed their original home world. Most of the Chapter's upper echelons were lost to the disaster, as were their historical records and all but a handful of their precious relics. Shorn of their identity and with no knowledge of which founding Chapter they hailed from, the Iron Angels nonetheless sought to do their duty to the Emperor's realm. They hollowed out the peak of Magdalor's tallest mountain and constructed a new fortress monastery within, which they named the Angels' Crown. Their last precious relics were set within the fortress' deepest chamber, only to be brought forth at times of great peril.

Over the millennia, the Iron Angels fought with courage and honour in the Emperor's name. Yet ill fortune still stalked them. Savage conflicts cost them dearly, their staunch code forbidding retreat in the face of all but certain destruction. Their finite stocks of gene-seed dwindled, as did the tribal populace from whom they recruited, culled by outbreaks of disease and psychic mutation. So it was that, when the *Vengeful Spirit* rumbled into orbit over Magdalor at the head of a traitor fleet, the Iron Angels were a diminished – albeit still stubbornly defiant – force.

The Iron Angels' cause was not hopeless, however. They possessed a formidable void fleet, which sped from its base above Magdalor's third moon to engage the heretic invaders. The planet's skies were soon streaked by the contrails of burning wreckage as loyalist and heretic warships tore at one another. Meanwhile, several hundred battle-brothers raced to man the formidable defences of the Angels' Crown. Armoured fighter craft sped from hangars in the mountain slopes and engaged the flocks of baroque Heldrakes sweeping down from on high. Astropaths hurled tersely worded distress

calls out into the void. Their efforts were more symbolic than practical. With Abaddon the Despoiler himself attacking them, the Iron Angels knew the battle would be decided one way or the other long before even the nearest reinforcements could arrive – but this did not stop them seeking to bring every Imperial blade they could to bear against the Warmaster.

For his part, Abaddon was cynically unsurprised to find his forces fighting alone against the loyalists. Vashtorr had not been seen since the *Vengeful Spirit* and its escorts entered the system. Presuming some capricious attempt to lure him into a trap, Abaddon nonetheless relished the chance to smash a Space Marine Chapter planet. Even as landing craft packed with Cultists and Black Legionnaires thundered down upon the mountain fastness, Abaddon gathered a massive force of Black Legion Terminators and launched his own teleport strike into the heart of the Angels' Crown. He was determined to end this fight swiftly and decisively, and to vent his recent frustrations in the process.

Abaddon and his elites exploded into being in the fortress' cavernous upper gallery and were immediately beset on all sides. A trio of grim-faced Librarians led the onslaught, and Abaddon realised that these psykers must have foreseen his impending attack. Relishing the challenge, the Despoiler stormed through the hail of bolt fire and plasma blasts to lock blades with two of the Librarians at once. Here and there a hulking Chaos Terminator fell to a well-placed shot, but the traitors' own fire punched loyalist battle-brothers and Scouts alike from their feet. Falkus Kibre and his brethren smashed headlong into a knot of robe-clad Chapter veterans, the cream of both armies trading ringing blows beneath the impassive gaze of towering marble statues.

Abaddon tore the head from one of his opponents, only for the other to hammer him with a stinging psychic assault. Snarling with fury, weeping tears of black blood, the Warmaster brought Drach'nyen down in an unstoppable arc that split the Librarian from shoulder to hip. Showered in gore, Abaddon strode to join Kibre's warriors even as the mountain shuddered under the hammering of orbital bombardment. One by one, the loyalist warriors fell. Abaddon tore his way through each gunmetal-armoured warrior that came at him with oaths of hatred on their lips and blades in their hands. Suddenly, the onslaught was over. The gallery rang with the last echoes of gunfire, and of armoured bodies clattering to the flagstone floor.

Abaddon led the way from the gallery and deeper into the fortress. His plan called for a killing strike into the very heart of the foe's position – he would tear apart the Apothecarion, loot the Chapter's gene-seed and burn the Reclusiam even as his forces on the surface kept the outer defenders busy. Yet as Abaddon led the way deeper into the Angels' Crown he discovered scenes of carnage. Space Marines and Chapter helots alike sprawled amidst the bloodied wreckage of destroyed chambers. Armoured bulkheads had transformed into cog-toothed maws and devoured those seeking to defend them. Menial servitors had mutated and melded into nightmarish monsters, and everywhere Abaddon saw the telltale spatters of ectoplasm and the livid scarring left by warpflame. Someone else had already torn the heart from the Angels' Crown, and the Warmaster suspected he knew who.

His forces met the shackled daemons and mutant war engines of Vashtorr's host near the fortress' heart. Here the Iron Angels' Chapter Master and the last of his First Company were staging a defiant stand to protect both Reclusiam and Apothecarion. Wasting no time, Abaddon led his elite warriors in alongside the gibbering and clattering daemon hordes. The fight that followed would have added many a noble entry to the annals of the Iron Angels, had any survived to record them. When malevolent entities erupted from the very machineries of the Apothecarion, Reclusiarch Arzen led a furious counter-attack that might have cleansed the chamber entirely had Vashtorr himself not crushed the defiant Chaplain with the Hammer of the Soul Forges. With the stench of blood and brimstone thick in the air, Chapter Master Nymarn met Abaddon himself upon the steps of the Reclusiam. The two mighty warriors traded blow after blow, until at last Abaddon rammed Drach'nyen hilt-deep through Nymarn's chest. As the daemon blade drank of the Chapter Master's essence, the last of the loyalists was dragged down and slain.

In the aftermath of battle, Vashtorr and Abaddon strode side by side into the corpse-strewn Reclusiam. The daemon ignored precious tapestries and glowing blades, halting instead before a tall marble pillar. It floated in a suspensor field, a chunk of bedrock still clinging to its base and an eroded suggestion of a Space Marine stood atop it. Abaddon looked questioningly at the pillar, then at Vashtorr. The daemon, for his part, simply beckoned. The suspensor field shuddered. Its soft golden light curdled to smoky brown as its projectors sprouted writhing fleshmetal tendrils and scuttled obediently to Vashtorr's side, bringing the pillar with them. Here, it seemed, was the coveted prize they had come to Magdalor to claim.

'Let us return to your warship, Abaddon Warmaster. I feel your curiosity, your blade-sharp need to understand, and it empowers me. Yet these are words that must pass between us in utmost secret. Trust me for but a few short hours more, and in return I will give you the key to unlock final and absolute victory.'

- Vashtorr the Arkifane, addressing Abaddon the Despoiler amidst the ruin of the Iron Angels' Reclusiam

The observation deck was huge, capable of accommodating hundreds behind its eye-shaped armaglass viewport. Only three figures occupied it now, standing side by side: Abaddon the Despoiler; the Sorcerer Lord Xorphas; the hulking entity that called itself Falkus Kibre. The Warmaster gazed out into the darkness of the deep void, and the scene of furious industry unfolding amidst it. The raid on Magdalor lay now months in the past, and much had happened since, yet still his mind kept sliding back to the events of that day and unpicking them once again. He had no intention of ever trusting Vashtorr, and so kept part of his mind alert for any minute clue that the daemon might be acting in bad faith. As yet he had found none. In the meantime he had decided to work with his strange new ally. The daemon could always be destroyed if it proved false, and if its promises actually proved to be true…

'Strange to see such a leviathan of the warp so humbled.'

Xorphas' observation broke Abaddon's train of thought. The Despoiler realised he had been watching the scene beyond the viewport without really seeing it. He refocused his attention.

Out there, close enough to be visible to the naked eye, the colossal form of the space hulk *Stygian Heart* hung amidst a cage of void-borne gantries and forge platforms. The craft was immense. Prow to stern it was over a hundred miles in length and so massive that it resembled a mountain range cast adrift in space. Yet Abaddon thought that none but a madman could imagine mountains such as these. The *Stygian Heart* was an agglomeration of dozens, perhaps hundreds, of individual vessels fused grotesquely by the energies of the warp. The gods alone knew how many centuries the mutant vessel had spent adrift upon the currents of the empyrean, what xenos or renegade warbands had ridden aboard it or what worlds had died when the gheist-ship cast its shadow across them. What was certain was that this malevolent mass of twisted metal, mutant flesh and compacted stone would make a potent weapon for one who could turn it to their will.

'If you imagine that monster to be humbled, you are a fool,' said Kibre. His rumbling voice was every bit as inhuman as the visage Abaddon knew lurked behind his black-armoured helm.

'The Arkifane is certainly making every effort to chain it,' Xorphas replied.

'And we aid the daemon in that,' mused Abaddon.

A constellation of cold white lights flickered across the many melded hulls of the *Stygian Heart*. Each one marked another las-cutter or welding array, sparking amidst the gloom as dark magi and their labour gangs worked to augment and enslave the hulk. Gun turrets, shield generators, auspicator vanes and more were being added. Weapons and support systems were grafted to the monstrous ship even as huge runes of binding were carved into its hull and ritual chains welded to it to form miles-long sigils.

Abaddon saw other lights flaring too, blood red or rippling blue and green. Each indicated the progress of another of Vashtorr's grotesque daemonic engineers, scuttling over the hull on their many legs and working warp-knew-what strange alterations. Vashtorr himself floated above the hulk amidst a roiling storm of warp lightning. Every few moments a braided bolt of energy would arc out from the mass to worm its way deep inside the *Stygian Heart*.

'Lord, I have doubts,' said Kibre. 'We have spent thousands of mortal soldiers in the clearing of this vessel alone, as well as a score of renegades. For all that, barely a third of the *Stygian Heart* has been rendered viable by the labour crews. I do not believe the inner structures can be cleared. Whatever the entities are that haunt them, no amount of mortal warriors will ever drive them out.'

'Perhaps some more esoteric beings should make the attempt?' suggested Xorphas, with a sly glance in Kibre's direction.

'There are already too many worthy battlefields thirsting for the libation of Black Legionnaires' blood,' said Abaddon. 'We will waste none on this task.'

'Yet Lord, if this endeavour is truly as important as the Arkifane has implied…'

Xorphas let the question hang. Abaddon felt a smile tug at his lips at the prying. There weren't many amongst his Chosen with the nerve to speak thus around him.

Again he found his thoughts straying back to the aftermath of Magdalor. Upon returning to the *Vengeful Spirit*, Abaddon had inspected the strange column jutting from its lump of bedrock. The Iron Angels had called this object the Oathing Stone, so said the brass plaque still visible amidst the fleshmetal corruption of its scuttling suspensor plinth. Abaddon had sensed nothing mystical about the column nor the weathered suggestion of an armoured warrior that perched atop it.

He had turned to Vashtorr who loomed nearby, the burning lamps of his eyes fixed upon Abaddon.

'What is this thing, for which so much blood was shed? The prophecy does not mention an Oathing Stone.'

'It does not,' Vashtorr had replied in a voice like forgefire. *'Yet when a warrior speaks of his gun, is he not in truth speaking of trigger, of stock and magazine, of barrel, sights, and many other mechanisms besides?'*

'Do not start speaking in riddles now, daemon,' Abaddon had said. 'I have given you the hours you requested. Now tell me plainly what this is about.'

Vashtorr had given a nod that set mechanisms within the daemon's body ticking and whirring. He had turned and prowled into the *Vengeful Spirit's* innermost sanctum, the column hovering along in its wake. Dismissing his bodyguards, Abaddon had followed and swung the doors closed behind him with a hollow boom.

Then had come the revelation, as the daemon explained the prize that was at stake, and the nature of that which had already been seized. Abaddon and Vashtorr had remained closeted in negotiations for hours. It was no great surprise his Chosen should be so curious as to precisely what the daemon had told him. After all, when Abaddon understood the true import of the Oathing Stone his cruel laughter had rung through the *Vengeful Spirit's* bridge and beyond.

Even now, Abaddon could not repress a grim chuckle at the thought.

'For all their prating piety, the lackeys of the Corpse Emperor are greater traitors than we will ever be. At least our rebellion was honest.'

'Lord?' asked Xorphas, wrong-footed by Abaddon's pronouncement. The Despoiler shook his head.

'If the daemon speaks truth, Xorphas, then be content for now that the prize we play for is worth the lives of every warrior in our Legion. But we do not call this conflict the Long War for nothing. The strength of the Black Legion will be needed soon enough, and trust me when I tell you that no part of the campaign that follows will proceed without our oversight. But this, now? It is the elimination of vermin, nothing more. We do not need these craft to be entirely purged of their indigenous hazards. They need only be cleared enough to serve our purposes for as long as we require them.'

'Evidently the Arkifane agrees with your assessment, Lord,' said Kibre. Sure enough, Abaddon saw that the sparklights across the *Stygian Heart* were dying off. The lightning storm that danced about Vashtorr's distant form contracted again, the daemon becoming little more than a coruscating point of light amidst the darkness. Minutes crawled by as thrusters lit the darkness of the void, each arc of light telling its own tale. Landers would be lifting off, extracting the surviving purgation forces from the outer structures of the space hulk. Forge barges would be wallowing up and away, scattering from the hulk like a shoal of fish darting back from some colossal predator. Next went the skeletal gantries, their own built-in propulsion shrines building enough momentum to ponderously pry apart the cage holding the *Stygian Heart* in place. Distant starlight rippled over structures that from this distance seemed impossibly flimsy.

'Who has been entrusted with command of this Ark?' asked Kibre.

'The *Stygian Heart* has been presented to Apophari Quen and his coven,' said Abaddon. 'To them falls the assault upon Aelech IV.'

'The Scourged,' said Xorphas, speaking the name as though it were excrement he had discovered upon his tongue.

'It is said they know every lie spoken by man,' observed Kibre. 'I am surprised they would accept your offer, Lord, knowing all they do.'

'Knowledge breeds arrogance in the foolish,' replied Abaddon.

'And drives the unworthy to madness,' added Xorphas. 'Dark Gods alone know what convoluted path they walk or why.'

'So long as it leads them first to Aelech IV, I care not where insight or insanity lead them after,' said Abaddon.

Through the vast viewing window, the last of the gantries could be seen firing its retro-thrusters and slowing to a stop. What had once been a cage now resembled an exploded schematic. Now came a faint tremor that Abaddon felt through the deck of the *Vengeful Spirit*. Out in the void dozens of ferocious new stars were born as vast engines lit all across the flanks and stern of the *Stygian Heart*. Despite himself, Abaddon's eyes widened a little at the sight. Gradually the behemoth of the deep warp gained momentum, hauling itself forward and sweeping with ponderous grace away from the assembled warships of the Black Legion fleet.

Abaddon followed the hulk's progress as it receded, making for the staging area. Again a cruel smile tugged at the Despoiler's mouth as he watched the *Stygian Heart* settle into its place in the growing formation. With Vashtorr's aid he had harnessed not just one immense space hulk, but dozens. There they hung, each lumpen as an ogre and unique in its own horrific aspect. They represented a gathering of void-borne might unlike anything unleashed since the fiercest days of the Gothic War.

'My Arks of Omen. If the corpse-worshippers could see the storm about to break, they would fall to their knees in despair.'

++ LOOK NOT UP FROM YOUR LABOURS LEST WHAT YOU SEE DISMAYS YOU ++

THE ARKS OF OMEN

It is within the gift of daemons to know that which mortals cannot. Vashtorr the Arkifane had traded esoteric insight with Abaddon in return for an ally whose reach and power exceeded that of any other heretic warlord. Yet knowledge was not all the daemon offered. He provided also the aid of the daemonic legions that fought in his thrall and, crucially, the ability to fashion the colossal warships that would become known as Arks of Omen.

Vashtorr had shared a potent secret with Abaddon. The daemon had, it seemed, illuminated the path to a weapon of such unimaginable power that it would allow its wielder to change the fate of the galaxy. Even with their individual might, it was a prize that neither could easily claim alone. Thus had they struck their bargain, that they would remain allies long enough for both to achieve their aims.

The first step along this fateful road was to secure a great number of esoteric artefacts, scattered across time and space during a long-ago catastrophe. Even Vashtorr did not know precisely what form all of these artefacts might take, though he had spent many lifetimes of mortal beings seeking to understand them. What the daemon had learned was that every artefact shared a unique warp signature. This signature could be followed to hunt the artefacts down. He had also determined, after a great deal of arcane trial and error, how a combination of infernal ritual, warp alchemy and inhuman ingenuity could be employed to combine the scattered artefacts into what he called simply the Key.

The artefacts had first to be acquired, however, and herein lay the task of

Vashtorr's flesh-and-blood allies. Some of the Key-fragments he had traced to blasted wastelands, or pinpointed drifting amidst the trackless vaults of the void. The vast majority lay on worlds settled by the galaxy's sentient races, however. Some were buried, lost beneath sprawling civilisations unaware of the arcane treasure beneath their feet. Others had been hoarded by the wise or the avaricious, hidden away behind high walls and under heavy guard.

Some of the artefacts could be seized by subterfuge, by the swift strikes of kill teams or the actions of double agents. However, most would require costly military offensives to secure. Determined not to spend an excess of Black Legion lives in what he viewed as secondary conflicts, Abaddon formulated a plan with Vashtorr that drew upon the vast hordes of mortal Chaos worshippers at war throughout the stars. The word filtered out through sorcerous visions and the whispers of daemons. Any renegade warlord or champion of the Dark Gods willing to come and kneel before Abaddon would receive his patronage, but also a mighty gift; provided their first action was to complete the task their Warmaster set them, each champion would be rewarded with mastery of one of the Arks of Omen. Command of such an immense and dangerous vessel was a prize fit to draw many great champions.

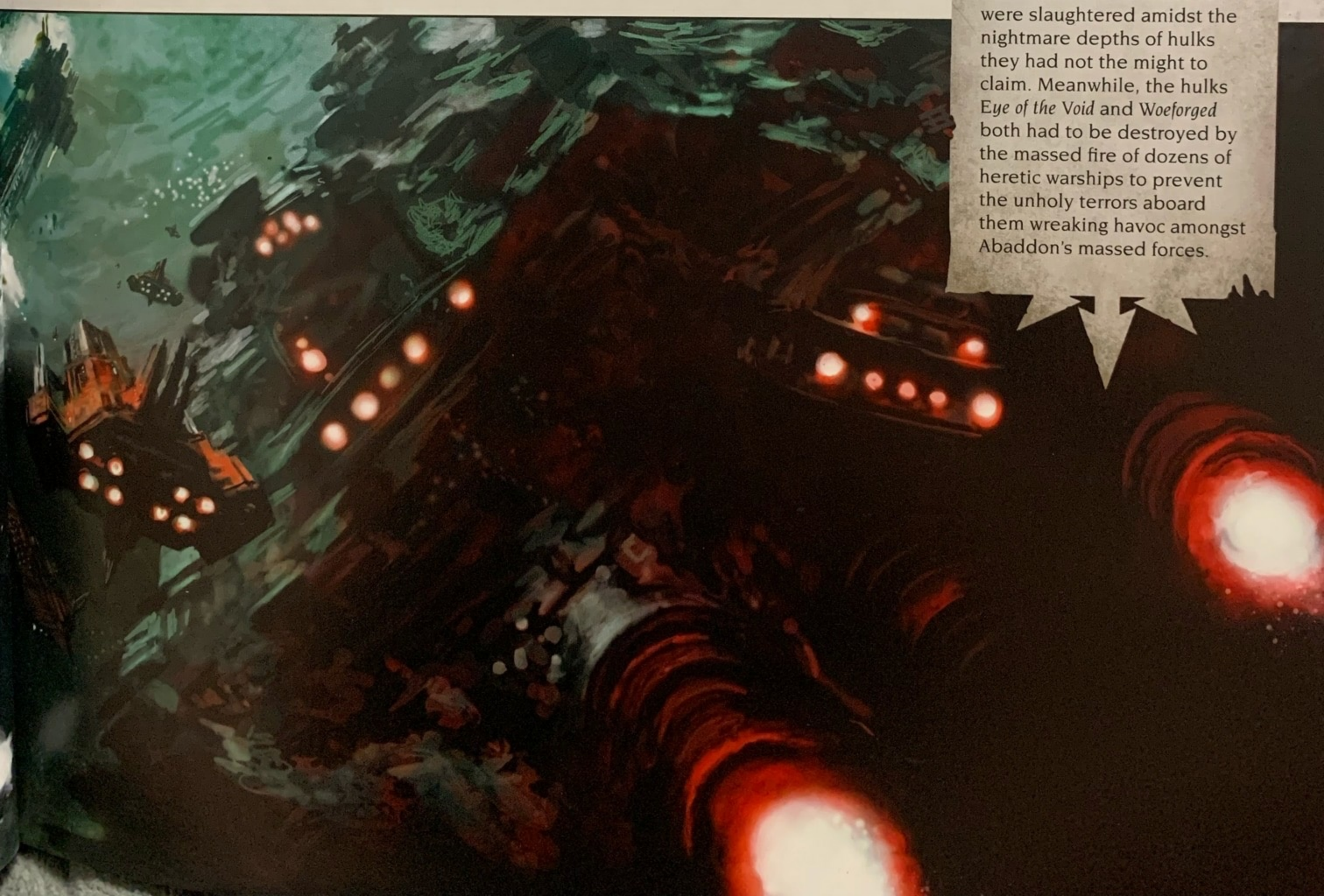
VESSELS OF DAMNATION

Each Ark began as a space hulk. These immense conjoined vessels formed in the warp when haunted wrecks and drifting craft were melded violently by the power of Chaos. Saturated with empyric energies, often distorted further by the incorporation of asteroidal masses and seething mutant flesh, these hulks drifted on the tides of the warp. Wherever they dropped from the empyrean into realspace they brought with them dread and damnation. Monstrous alien broods; hosts of warp-touched renegades; eldritch and unspeakable entities; all these and more might be found within a space hulk, and could spill forth to bring horror and misery to any world in their path.

It was through Vashtorr's artifice that Abaddon's Sorcerers and Warpsmiths were able to pinpoint hulks amidst the madness of the warp and drag them one by one into realspace. Each gruesome macro-ship was drawn to the same region of interstellar void, deep in the Imperium Nihilus. Here, safe from discovery by hostile forces, Abaddon had amassed a fleet of Dark Mechanicum vessels and forge platforms. Watched over by prowling wolf packs of renegade warships, these magi employed the forbidden teachings of Vashtorr and worked the twisted changes upon each new hulk that would transform it into an Ark of Omen.

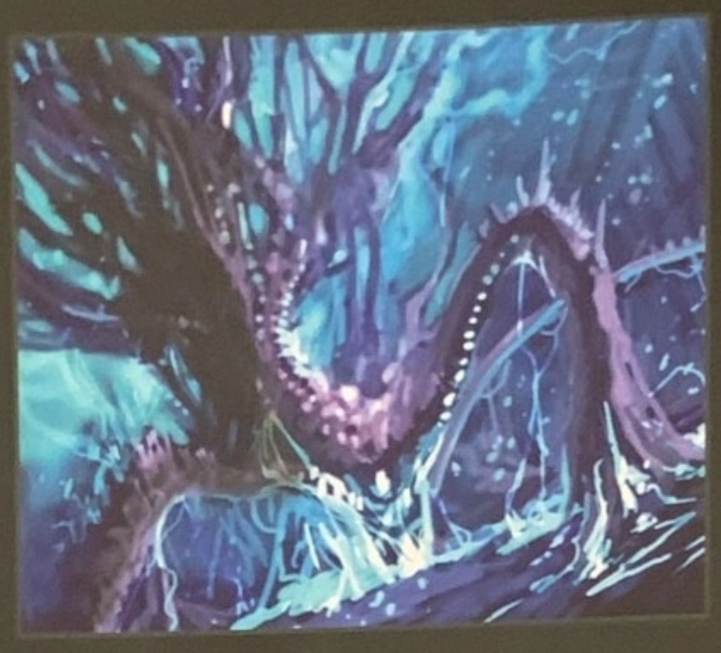
PERILS WITHIN

Though no two space hulks are alike, all are tremendously dangerous. Warp corruption, containment failures or structural collapse render entire regions of a hulk inimical. Predatory denizens and lurking malevolent entities pose even greater threats. When added to the fact that many hulks are easily as large as planetoids and honeycombed with tunnels and chambers, it is easy to see why entire military campaigns were waged simply to clear each Ark of Omen for use. Many were led by the very renegades who had been promised mastery of the craft, for if a Chaos champion could not even claim their own ship then they were no use to the Despoiler. Not all such endeavours were successful. The Red Slayers, Bashark's Howlers, the Cult Umbran, the Verdigrised Guard and others besides were slaughtered amidst the nightmare depths of hulks they had not the might to claim. Meanwhile, the hulks *Eye of the Void* and *Woeforged* both had to be destroyed by the massed fire of dozens of heretic warships to prevent the unholy terrors aboard them wreaking havoc amongst Abaddon's massed forces.



WARDINGS

To bind the Arks of Omen, and to prevent rebellion by the corrupted and vestigial machine spirits lingering within their component craft, each was bound about with ritual wards. Some took the form of colossal runic inscriptions seared right into the hull plates or etched into countless passageways and bulkheads within. Others were immense runic chains, ritual altars or shrines erected throughout the craft, or even cages full of bound and blinded witches with their powers slaved to the task in hand.



FLESHMETAL GANGLIAXOS

Each bolt of warp energy Vashtorr sent coiling down to pierce the captive space hulk transmogrified into swarms of silvery cybernematodes. These in turn burrowed deep into the melded ships and systems that made up the hulk, exuding warp-silicate strands behind them and at times even stretching and braiding themselves into synapse-like fleshmetal cabling. As these autocognitive pathways spread through the hulk they connected and parasitised any mechanical system still viable within a single command and control network. This was the gangliaxos, whose root-strands eventually converged within the designated control nexus of the newly fashioned Ark of Omen.

THE WARP PORTAL

Every Ark of Omen incorporated a captive warp portal. Some were huge ritual circles conjured within some cavernous hangar or cargo space aboard the Ark itself. Others were infernal maelstroms of energy or fanged and fleshy masses that churned behind or below the Ark, sustained between towering iron vanes or hovering, rune-inscribed menhirs that crackled with unholy power. Few besides Abaddon or Vashtorr knew the true purpose of these portals when the Arks set sail.

THE UNHALLOWED

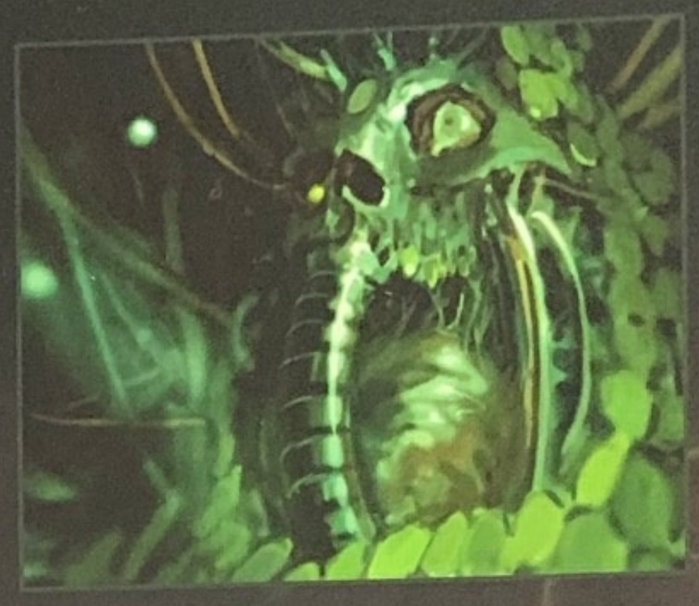
Though each Ark of Omen was a distorted and anarchic nightmare each its own, a handful of similarities distinguished them as being part of Abaddon and Vashtorr's monstrous fleet. These coordinated adaptations and additions were intended to ensure that each Ark would fulfil its role in advancing the prophecy, above and beyond whatever dire purposes its new masters might turn it to afterwards. The monstrous *Unhallowed* was amongst the first of the Arks of Omen to be created, and displayed all of these vital adaptations.

OBELYSKANE

Another infernal invention of the Arkifane, and one of his greatest offerings to Abaddon, the Obelyskane was an empyric beacon that burned like a raging bonfire in the warp. Generated by a freakish engine that melded flesh, iron and daemonic essence, each Obelyskane was powered by a warp-furnace that in turn was fed with the souls of psykers – a mockery of the Astronomican not lost upon Abaddon. Though short-ranged, these devices transformed each Ark into a highly visible waypoint amidst the maelstrom of the warp, allowing fleets of escorting warships to navigate by its presence and retain cohesion even while braving the raging warp storms of the Great Rift.

ADDITIONAL SYSTEMS

As the gangliaxos spread, it was typically able to reawaken some of the weapons systems, shields, communications arrays and so forth belonging to the vessels that made up the space hulk. Many of these were ancient, or of esoteric alien design. Where they worked, they provided the vessels with all manner of bizarre and unexpected capabilities: temporal- or probability-based weapons systems; neutron shielding; quantum communications; counter-ballistic teleportation batteries; all these and many more were rendered operable. Yet such systems were also unreliable, and sometimes widely scattered with swathes of blank or dead hull in between. To compensate for this, dark magi sutured weapons batteries, shield generators, vox arrays, even launch-hangars and additional enginariums wherever they could be attached. Many of these installations were self-contained, generating their own air and power and in no way conjoined with the often-uncleared or hazardous spaces just feet away through the Ark's outer hull.



THE FERRYMAN

No conventional ship's bridge could be employed to command so leviathan and unnatural a craft as a space hulk. Nor could any conventional cogitator array or mortal mind reliably pilot systems so distorted by long exposure to the warp. Instead, where the vessel's gangliaxos converged, it melded with a daemonic pilot-entity called a Ferryman. Grotesque meldings of iron and brass, gears and boilers and pistons, with twitching limbs, bulging eyes and rippling warp-sensitive cilia, these entities served as both ship's bridge and crew. They were bound to obey the commands issued by the master of their Ark of Omen, though in truth their ultimate loyalty was to Vashtorr before any mortal.

++ LOOK NOT FOR HOPE AMONGST THE STARS, THERE IS ONLY DESPAIR ++

'Translation signature resolving now, my Lord. Awaiting clear astromantic alignment, should be any... second... Throne of Terra! Detecting multiple macro-class returns, confirm heretic ship designators. It's an entire renegade warfleet. Wait, what is that at the heart of their formation? Is that some manner of planetoid, or... Emperor's mercy... My Lord, commence the evacuation and commend our souls to– '

- Last transmission from void monitor station Herald-04

PLANS WITHIN PLANS

Even as Vashtorr laboured to fashion more Arks of Omen, the initial wave set out into the stars. More than a dozen Arks of Omen made up this first onslaught, plunging into the madness of the warp and setting their headings for coordinates Vashtorr provided. By itself each Ark was a war engine fit to bring ruination to entire worlds. Accompanied as they were by flotillas of conventional heretic warships, they became forces to rival the Indomitus Crusade battle groups in might. These were Abaddon's Balefleets, and they soon came to be feared by defenders within the Imperium Sanctus and Imperium Nihilus alike.

No two Balefleets were the same in composition, instead being made up of whichever champions and warbands had rallied to the banner of a particular Ark's master. Some of these followers were loyal, whether due to blood oaths, bonds of faith, or simply out of fear. Others cast avaricious eyes upon the Arks, and fought in their shadows only in the hopes of seizing command for themselves.

The *Ogre*, for instance, was captained by Lord Gulthorg the Blighted and garrisoned by his Nurgle-worshipping Renegade Chapter, the Sons of Rot. Sailing alongside the *Ogre* were the ships of the traitorous Morbidax regiments, the gruesome renegade Knights of House Gnaw, Archmagos Ovloch's vivisector squadrons and the vessels of the Plaguecrows and Vermin Guard renegade warbands. The latter two forces were long-time rivals, each of whose champions only offered allegiance to Lord Gulthorg so as to avoid their sworn enemies being the ones to gain his sole favour. By comparison, Iron Warriors Warsmith Czagra formed a fleet about his Ark *Herald of Misery* consisting entirely of subservient Iron Warriors warbands, oath-sworn Titan Legios and enslaved mortal cults. United by Legion loyalty and fear of reprisals, these forces followed Czagra's commands unquestioningly and made his Balefleet one of the most lethally efficient in the first wave.

Abaddon, of course, was not fool enough to believe the ambitious and self-interested masters of the Arks of Omen would obey his commands without fail. Fear of setting themselves against the Warmaster of the Imperium Nihilus might keep most in line for a time. However, there was no guarantee that these warlords would prioritise securing their allotted Key-fragment over personal conquests and glories once battle was joined.

Into some of the Balefleets, the Despoiler seeded shipmasters or champions whose loyalty to him was beyond question, and who would focus on the mission at hand. In a few cases, such as with the notoriously capricious Slaaneshi champion Asmilius the Glittering, Abaddon graciously favoured his new Ark masters with Black Legion honour guards of Chosen or Terminators. These warriors were more than simply an implicit threat. They would gladly give their lives for Abaddon's cause if pushed to it, cutting a bloody swathe through any who stood in their path.

Lastly, and most insidiously, the Despoiler made a secret pact with a number of Alpha Legion operatives who then infiltrated almost every Balefleet. It would be their task to ensure that Key-fragment acquisition occurred, even should everything else go awry. What reward the Alpha Legionnaires were promised for their services remained between them and Abaddon.

In truth, both Abaddon and Vashtorr cared about only one thing – that each Balefleet successfully located and recovered its Key-fragment. After that, whatever trail of carnage and misery they wrought through Imperial space was a bonus. To this end, every Ark was provided with a coven of slave-psykers, their skulls parasitically augmented with insectile daemon helms. These foul devices aided their luckless wearers in following the warp signature of each Key-fragment, while goading them on with a single-minded desperation that turned them into little more than flesh-and-blood auspicators. As the first invasions began, on Thassica, on the ice moons of Korbrach and into the industrial sprawls of Vaingloria, these twisted figures led their masters across blazing battlefields and unerringly to each prize.

To Abaddon's agents there seemed little rhyme or reason to the nature of the Key-fragments they acquired. After weeks of bloody siege warfare on the shrine world of Lume IV, Warsmith Czagra's Chosen tore open the world's innermost reliquarium only to discover that their prize was an ancient and fire-blackened cogitator bank held within a glimmering stasis field. By comparison, Alpha Legion agents penetrating the ancient archeotech dig site on Hassp were guided by their slave-psykers to what appeared to be a meteorite embedded in the planet's bedrock.

No matter the nature of the fragment, the order was always the same. Once recovered, it was to be brought to the warp portal swirling within or around the Ark of Omen. Binding enchantments had been placed upon each portal by Vashtorr himself, their existence known only to Abaddon's most trusted champions. These wards ensured only a Key-fragment –

and those bearing it – could pass safely into the warp portal and thence be transported to a secret location where the fragments could be amassed. In truth not every fragment was vital for the plan to work – Vashtorr was the daemon demigod of engineers, after all, and could create many metaphysical workarounds if called upon to do so. However, the more fragments that could be successfully recovered, the greater the power of the Key would be, while certain especially significant and powerful fragments were vital. As the Balefleets spread out across the stars, these important recovery missions were entrusted only to Abaddon's most reliable and powerful champions.

WAR ON MANY FRONTS

By the time the first wave of Balefleets had descended upon their targets, and a second was thundering out upon the tides of the warp, there were Arks of Omen committed to war zones in almost every Imperial segmentum. They did battle not only against semi-isolated loyalist enclaves amidst the darkness of the Imperium Nihilus, but they also crossed the Great Rift to assault sites deep within the Imperium Sanctus. With the favour of the Dark Gods, and unreliant as they were upon the Astronomican, renegade warbands had spilled from the rift ever since it had first manifested. However, the feat of holding together coordinated fleets and striking directly from the Imperium Nihilus across immense distances against specific locations in the Imperium Sanctus, this was something else entirely. Now, the Ferrymen and Obelyskanes of the Arks of Omen made this dark miracle possible again and again.

Balefleets darkened the skies above shrine worlds, struck at teeming hive and forge worlds, and even assailed remote outposts and seemingly worthless death worlds. At times they ignored Imperial holdings altogether, venting their fury against worlds or systems overrun by Orks, Tyranids or even other heretic factions. For those Imperial commanders high-placed enough to see something of the developing picture, it was baffling.

Had it not been for reported similarities – the Arks of Omen, the pilfering of obscure archeotech, the onslaughts of supernatural entities that necessitated costly Inquisitorial purges – many Imperial commanders would have been tempted to call the raids random. Yet when even hidden enclaves of the Inquisition were unerringly located and plundered, it was hard to sustain such a belief. Though several Arks of Omen were boarded and purged during valiant Imperial counter-attacks, many more continued to wreak havoc, while the purpose of their assault remained opaque to their hapless victims.

ONSLAUGHT OF THE ARKS

Wherever the Arks of Omen blotted out the stars, bloody campaigns erupted as traitor forces descended to wreak havoc. Even amongst these cauldrons of violence, some conflicts were notable in their cataclysmic savagery.

One such campaign unfolded in the Cortosa System. Cortosa III was a mighty fortress world of great antiquity and garrisoned by over two hundred regiments of Astra Militarum. Deep within the planet's Fortum Primus was a martial museum, a trophy hall of weapons and armour gathered over the millennia, one sword of which was a Key-fragment. Cortosa III also boasted a formidable coven of seers, and it was their warnings that saw the planet's High Command issue requests for aid before the Balefleet even appeared in their skies. Reinforcements raced to respond from the Adepta Sororitas Convent on Cortosa VI and the Black Templars keep on lifeless Cortosa X. Before they could reach their destination, however, the approaching Balefleet tore from the warp and fell upon Cortosa III.

It was the *Ogre*'s Balefleet that struck at this world, Lord Gulthorg the Blighted having designs upon corrupting and then claiming the fortified planet for himself. He would ensure Abaddon got his prize, but first he would claim a seat of power from which to build a suppurating empire in Nurgle's name. Having detected the incoming enemy reinforcements, Gulthorg tasked the Plaguecrows and Vermin Guard with defeating the Imperial warships before they could make orbit. He and his Sons of Rot, meanwhile, led the Morbidax regiments, the Dark Mechanicum vivisectors and the cadaverous Knights of House Gnaw in a drop assault.

Hundreds of renegade landing craft darkened the skies of Cortosa III. Though many were shot down by turbo-laser batteries and Vulture gunships, many more disgorged their passengers safely. Soon ferocious fighting raged through the Munifica Maxima, all along the fortified mountain range of the Absolutis Colossi, and over the training plains of the Expans Martial. Viral weapons strikes reduced thousands of loyalists to slicks of bubbling slime, out of which daemons indebted to Vashtorr crawled in moaning masses. A huge loyalist armoured spearhead swept between the towers of the Arcadia Ballistus and into the Expans Martial from the south, throwing back the Knights of House Gnaw. At the same time a vicious orbital battle streaked the skies with fire as the zealous Imperial reinforcements attempted to punch through Gulthorg's blockade ships. Costly boarding actions saw vessels of both sides scuttled, while others were raked by lance fire and broken apart by torpedo volleys.

A DARKENED PATH

The Farseers of the Aeldari possess the ability to scry all possible futures. It was a conclave of these seers, from multiple craftworlds, who reached out to Lord Inquisitor Coteaz of the Ordo Malleus. Coteaz was a powerful and respected daemon hunter, a level-headed pragmatist who heard out the strange xenos delegation in silence. Each of them had perceived a strand of fate, so they said, growing in potency and so drowned in darkness not one amongst them could perceive its end. They knew only that this darkened path had some connection to the Balefleets, and that it filled them with a presentiment of doom. Many of their people were already fighting to turn back or destroy the Balefleets, but they could not prevail alone. They needed Humanity's aid. Coteaz did not commit either way, and his strange visitors departed without the assurances they had sought, though – he pointed out archly – with their lives, which was more than some of his fellow Inquisitors might have allowed. Yet the moment he was alone, the Lord Inquisitor began readying orders to send to his best agents. He needed to know more of this business, and quickly.

Eventually, however, the loyalists' unity in faith saw them overcome the rival renegade warbands, who could not bring themselves to fight together even at the last.

After days of battle on the surface, Lord Gulthorg was forced to abandon command of the ground war and return along with many of his Sons of Rot to garrison their Ark against the Imperial warships. This was the moment the Alpha Legionnaires concealed within the traitor forces had waited for. Not trusting Gulthorg to fulfil Abaddon's orders, they issued their own carefully seeded commands through hijacked vox channels. At their false orders, an immense heretic attack wave abandoned their positions and broke against the walls of the Fortum Primus. Strategically the move was insane, leaving Gulthorg's ground forces horribly out of position. Yet the very madness of the assault caught the Fortum's defenders unawares and saw breaches blasted in their walls in a matter of hours. By the time loyalist ground forces converged to capitalise on the bizarre strategic misstep, the Alpha Legionnaires had plundered the trophy hall, stolen a shuttle and plunged through the warp portal that shimmered beneath the *Ogre*'s prow.

This was but one example of the bloody mayhem wrought by the Balefleets. On Aggamedes, the Ark *Bloodmaw* and its escort fleet began a months-long conflict against the maniples of forge world Graia that saw entire planets depopulated. Amidst the Rasputar Cluster the *Bane of Life*'s Balefleet plunged into an ongoing war between the Kin of the Kronus Hegemony and the Orks of Waaagh! Skullkrakka. The resultant carnage swiftly escalated to apocalyptic levels. Meanwhile, a hit-and-run conflict played out through the sprawling Serpessa Nebulae. Here, Flensemaster Thavak of the Night Lords found his Balefleet beset at every turn by the Asuryani of Craftworld Ulthwé and the Drukhari of the Kabal of the Iron Thorn, who sought to pick apart Thavak's forces one warband at a time.

REPRISALS

The Balefleets wreaked havoc from the fringes of the Imperium Nihilus to the heartlands of the Segmentum Solar. They did not go unopposed, however. Not only did localised defence forces strive to drive off or destroy the heretic fleets, but there were also those who struck out to hunt the Arks of Omen in earnest.

With the galaxy plunging ever deeper into anarchy, large-scale communication, coordination or sharing of strategic intelligence was no mean feat even for the most advanced races. This was to the advantage of the Balefleets. Each was self-contained and self-sufficient, plundering what supplies its support vessels could not render and obeying the centralised commands flowing from its Ark. When set against the interdependent formations of the Indomitus Crusade fleets and their need to act as component parts of a greater strategic whole, Abaddon had succeeded in translating the individualistic and anarchic natures of his followers into a freeing advantage. Not only could they act without having to maintain strategic coherency with other fleets, but in extremis each was – to the Despoiler – expendable, provided they first achieved their primary goal.

Many of those they attacked would only ever see a single Ark of Omen, either because they would not live to witness another or else because they fought in isolation to defend their allotted system or world. It was thus difficult for Abaddon's victims to recognise the seemingly random attacks as being part of the wider plan that they were. Many foes of Chaos had not yet realised that it was just such seemingly unconnected attacks that had eroded the primordial pylon network and allowed for the manifestation of the Great Rift, nor would they ever piece together the scraps of information to lead them to this conclusion.

How then could these same peoples – so mired in confusion and conflict, so thinly spread and beleaguered – hope to effect a coherent counter-strategy against Abaddon's latest plan?

And yet somehow some did. There were those who successfully recognised the growing threat, and who saw to it that the Arks of Omen did not rampage unopposed across the stars.

ALIEN WRATH

The Balefleets inevitably attracted the hostility of numerous xenos aggressors as they drove into the furthest reaches of the void. Some of these conflicts were isolated or random, such as the war with the territorial Kalavassi, or the damage to the *Blackened Tower* inflicted by Enslavers. Then there was the Balefleet of the *Sobbing God* that dropped out of the warp directly into the midst of a tendril of Hive Fleet Kraken. After their escort craft were overrun, Scourgemaster Ulghata and his surviving renegade forces retreated into the depths of their Ark and fortified their position. With bioforms swarming across the hull and pouring down every corridor, the traitors swiftly found themselves besieged within the heart of their own capital ship.

Some alien worlds unknowingly harboured Key-fragments. Beneath the dusty ruins of Vol, for instance, a Necron tomb complex of the Szarekhan Dynasty slumbered, unaware that a single buried urn would bring destruction upon them. When the warriors of a Thousand Sons warband teleported down from the Ark of Omen *Beast in Scarlet*, they caught the slumbering Necrons by surprise and tore the heart from their defences before excavating the urn from its spot amidst the tomb's foundations. Pleased with his work, Sorcerer Lord Hasomet returned to his vessel and his Balefleet departed. Unbeknown to the Thousand Sons, however, Overlord Somtatek of Vol – slain by the Thousand Sons while he slumbered in his stasis crypt – had been resurrected by means of arcane technologies on the neighbouring vassal world of Lok. Outraged at having been slain so dishonourably, the Overlord gathered a fleet of tomb ships and all of his surviving legions and gave chase. He would bring vengeance down upon the *Beast in Scarlet* if he had to pursue the Ark across the entire galaxy.

THE ONALPA ASSAULT

The Onalpa System lay within the Imperium Sanctus, in a sub-sector perilously close to the storms of the Great Rift. Already its worlds had endured several random onslaughts by renegade warbands, but when the *Colossus* Balefleet translated into local space the beleaguered loyalist defenders believed their end had come. Boasting a huge and rapacious complement of Dark Mechanicum and Chaos Titans, the Balefleet scattered its forces, hosts of twisted magi and their servants falling upon the archeotech-rich worlds of Onalpa with greed. This was to provide the crucial opening that Chaplain Julianos and his Ultramarines strike force needed to assault the *Colossus* while its escort craft were dispersed. The Ark and its defenders were still nightmarish foes, and the attack cost the lives of every last Ultramarine in the boarding party. Yet by sending several enginariums into simultaneous meltdown, the loyalists triggered a series of blasts that tore the Ark apart.

THE DIAMOND TALON

The Arks of Omen were still space hulks for all their adaptations, and so still sources of both danger and potential archeotech riches. Many renegade bands given charge of the vessels continued to fight battles against the monstrous denizens within their own flagships and explore the inner depths, hoping to unearth powerful arcana. Nor were they alone in this. Like parasites feeding on ocean-going leviathans, forces of raiders from many races risked slipping aboard the Arks by cunning or stealth in search of riches. One such boarding party were Aeldari Corsairs of the Diamond Talon, whose raid upon the Ark *Devourer of Hope* was so successful that they found themselves with a chance to strike at its command centre and cripple the vessel. Envisioning the carnage and disruption the Ark would cause amidst local Imperial Navy patrols, the Aeldari pirates instead withdrew and left the renegades to their bloodshed, certain they would be able to capitalise upon it.

SUBSUMED

The N*etherworld Blade* Balefleet rampaged through War Zone Chalnath. One gruelling campaign after another took their toll upon the Ark's fleet, until soon the goliath craft lumbered on alone. It was then that a ragtag fleet of renegades known as Jekor's Slayers fell upon it. They sought to seize the warship by boarding it and storming its command centre. However, Jekor and his renegades found themselves facing not mortal or even post-human foes, but a nightmare host of daemons melded with pulsating fleshmetal technologies. Worse, this machine-contagion swiftly spread through the boarding party themselves. Gruesome mechanical growths erupted from their bodies and wargear, dragging some screaming into the fabric of the Ark and transforming others into vessels for more possessor tech-daemons. Soon enough, the N*etherworld Blade* had a new escort fleet, made up of the mutated warships and contaminated crews that had once followed Jekor.

'Commence attack! Full spread bombardment! Launch all attack craft, leave nothing in reserve! Abaddon will have his prize if I have to dig it out from beneath the bloodied corpses of every worthless loyalist wretch on that world!'

- Warsmith Czagra, during the attack upon Yarvos IX

Another of Abaddon's Balefleets, under Lady Maeve of House Grendyl, arrived in the Polyhadra System expecting to claim their prize easily from a ramshackle greenskin empire. Instead they found a thriving enclave of the Greater Thurian League, with the only sign of Ork occupation being drifting wreckage belts strewn across the void. The Kin had sliced apart the world on which Lady Maeve's prize had been hidden for so long, and its carcass had long since vanished into the churning machineries of colossal mining ships. The Key-fragment's psychic spoor now led away and into the distant galactic core. Before she could disengage and pursue her prize, however, Maeve's twisted honour code demanded she punish the Kin for their interference. Soon, savage battle raged across every surviving world in the Polyhadra System.

Other xenos forces actively sought out the many Balefleets and tried to destroy them, recognising them for the threats they were. The Craftworlds of Ulthwé, Saim-Hann, Yme-Loc and their allies had not just reached out to Humanity's Inquisition for aid. They had their own forces in the field, Harlequins aiding them in forging an alliance of Asuryani, Drukhari, Corsairs and Exodites who used hit-and-run attacks to slow or redirect the relentless advance of the Balefleets.

LOYALTY AND VENGEANCE

The Aeldari were not the only ones to hunt the Arks of Omen. Though Inquisitor Coteaz was amongst the first to begin active operations against the Balefleets, he was far from the only agent of the Ordos to do so. Some worked from the shadows and manipulated others. Some led requisitioned assault forces, or simply disseminated information to Indomitus Crusade groupmasters and Space Marine Chapter Masters. All ensured that as many Arks as possible were intercepted and, weakened before they reached their target worlds.

The boarding of the *Morbidius* by Iron Hands Terminators under Captain Albaar; the void battle upon the very lip of the black hole known as the Howling Pit; the mysterious destruction of both the *Reaper's Shadow* Balefleet and the planet of Rodiar that it was attacking – all these actions and more could be ascribed to Inquisitorial machinations.

Space Marines and Battle Sisters proved the most effective Imperial troops for boarding actions against the Arks of Omen. In such nightmarish confines their exceptional discipline, morale and wargear were vital assets. Boarding and purging space hulks had been perilous enough even when the vessels dropped from the warp at random and drifted alone

DANTE RESPONDS

When an Ark bore down upon the agri worlds of the Saganas Belt deep in the Imperium Nihilus, Commander Dante led a force of Blood Angels to intercept. Upon reaching their destination they found the hulk, the *Night Terror*, drifting lifeless in the void. Wrecked heretic warships hung about it like some macabre garland. Boarding the hulk, Dante and his battle-brothers discovered sulphurous residue and the withered remains of widespread biomechanical infestation, mingled with traces that bizarrely resembled wilted plant life. There were also corpses. Dead Heretic Astartes and cultists lay strewn throughout the silent hulk. Some bore explosive wounds that told of bolter rounds. Others had been hewn as though by some great blade. Though they searched for several days, the Blood Angels could find no further clue as to the fate of the *Night Terror*. Ordering samples analysed, Dante led his warriors back to their ships, determined to learn more of this ominous occurrence.

through settled space. Now, facing directed and weaponised hulks accompanied by hostile escort craft, it was a task that required entire Imperial war fleets to even stand a chance of success. Some Space Marine Chapters were able to attempt such actions alone. Those with strong fleet components such as the Black Templars, the Crimson Lament or the Void Tridents orchestrated successful attacks that saw Balefleets suffer significant damage. Other Chapters – and virtually all of the Adepta Sororitas – were not so fortunate in their naval strength. They instead enlisted the aid of the Navis Imperialis. More than one Balefleet met stiff resistance after closing with Imperial Navy flotillas only to find vengeful power-armoured killers blasting their way aboard their ships.

Few interdiction missions were wholly successful – in many cases simply damaging or slowing an Ark of Omen was as much of a victory as could be hoped for. Many such assaults were desperate actions in the face of overwhelming heretic strength. Others were launched only to buy time for planets to be evacuated, or for Inquisitorial agents to determine what precious treasure the heretics might come in search of. At Thracian Primaris, in the Titus Sub-sector, and on Savlar, counter-attacks were scattered before the Balefleets pressed on to sow carnage.

INTERNECINE STRIFE

Ironically, several of the most successful attacks against Balefleets were launched by rival Chaos warlords, either having gleaned some word of Abaddon's plans and seeking to work against them, or simply in an effort to capture an Ark for themselves. One Ark and its attendant vessels vanished altogether deep in the Maelstrom while in flagrant violation of the territories of the Red Corsairs. Another fell prey to the furious onslaught of a Word Bearers warband who saw the trammelling of the space hulks as an affront to the Dark Gods. The zealots broke the pivotal bindings placed upon the *Neverlight* and unleashed a tide of ravening daemonic entities that wrought destruction upon attackers, defenders, and the nearby mining world of Karmyne alike.

Yet it was the scuttling of the *Dirge Discordant* that saw Abaddon take to the field in person. The Ark, which was overrun by an enormous host of Khornate Daemonkin and their supernatural allies, had been en route to the Chyron System where lay one of the most ritually significant Key-fragments of all. Coldly furious at this transgression, the Despoiler first brought to battle and shattered the Daemonkin. He then took his surviving forces onward to Chyron Tertius, resolved to claim the fragment for himself.

Warmaster Abaddon led the advance across the precarious stone bridge. Devoid of anything resembling railings and barely twenty feet in width, the ancient expanse of carved rock was slick with black ice and exposed to the full fury of the blizzard lashing the Taurica Mountains. Chyron Tertius' snow fell black as sable. In the strobe of muzzle flares and the glare of huge arc lumen mounted upon the mountains' slopes, the flurries reminded Abaddon of the fluttering feathers of countless carrion birds. Several hundred feet to his rear, the bridge leapt out from Mount Sanctic to cross this yawning chasm. Ahead, visible only as a suggestion of something huge and dark in the gaps between the snowfall, loomed Mount Imperator. Cut into its rocky slopes was Abaddon's objective, the planet's Temple Ultima. Below the bridge wheeled a drop of almost a mile. Down there waited the icy waters of one of the sacred reservoirs that lurked in the shadows between the mountains' feet.

Abaddon strode forward, cloak billowing in the screaming winds. His Bringers of Despair marched three abreast behind him. Every few moments the bridge shuddered underfoot as another lance beam, fired from on high by the *Vengeful Spirit*, stabbed down through the night skies. Where the beams struck the mountainsides, roiling clouds of smoke and fire leapt high. In the infernal glare of the las-fire, the black snow of the mountainsides looked as though it were streaked with clotted gore.

Ahead of Abaddon, soldiers of the Astra Militarum were trying to stage a fighting retreat. They were not as sure footed as the Black Legionnaires, however. Those not slain by volleys of bolt shells were instead plucked from the bridge by the wind, or dislodged by the shock waves of the lance strikes. Abaddon could not hear the screams of the plummeting mortals over the thunder of gunfire and the wailing of the wind. Yet he knew they did scream. Those not slain by the impact with the frigid waters would certainly freeze and drown as their broken bodies sank into the supposedly blessed depths.

The thought brought him a brief flicker of amusement. It withered as a large-calibre cannon opened fire from the far end of the bridge. Bright lines of fire cut through the whirling black snow. A lucky shot blew out a Terminator's knee joint. The veteran warrior stumbled and was gone, dragged over the edge by the weight of his ancient wargear.

Abaddon snarled. This was all happening too slowly, costing too many of his warriors' lives. They should never have been here at all, should have been able to entrust this mission to the *Dirge Discordant*. Instead, here he was being intolerably delayed by the mountains, the weather and a band of irritatingly tenacious corpse-worshippers with the temerity still to call themselves Cadians – as though that were a badge of honour, and not of shame!

'I broke your pathetic planet,' he roared, his vox-amplified voice rebounding like thunder from the mountain slopes. 'You are the failed orphans of a murdered world. If I must break you a hundred times before you vermin learn your place then I shall do so!'

The Despoiler accelerated into a run, armour servos whining, footfalls pounding ice and stone. Incoming fire whipped around him. Abaddon ignored it, allowing rounds to splash harmlessly from his armour as he surged from the end of the bridge and onto the wide stone ledge beyond. The black snows parted to reveal Cadian soldiers dug in behind frozen sandbags in front of a huge carved archway framing a plasteel blast door. Here was the Ascensor's Gate, the only viable access point to the upper levels of the mountain and Abaddon's route to the Key-fragment he sought on this world. The Cadians could have put a hundred soldiers on this ledge and he would have cut his way through them just as readily. The Despoiler would not be denied.

The Cadians wore cold weather gear, but it was clear from their ice-rimed brows and the telltale blackening of noses and ears that many would have permanent scars from frostbite. Of course, Abaddon would not allow any of them to live long enough to suffer such a fate.

Their Sergeant yelled in hatred and fear and aimed her bolt pistol at Abaddon's head. Before she could fire, the barrels of the Talon of Horus blazed and the Sergeant was blasted into bloody ruin. The strewn corpse-meat steamed in the fierce cold. Abaddon hadn't slowed, and as he bore down upon the Cadians' position their fire became panicked. Lasbolts struck his breastplate and rebounded from his shoulder guards. None could pierce his armour.

A backhand swing of the Talon of Horus sundered the barricade, sending broken chunks of sandbag and bloodied bodies tumbling through the air. One Cadian slid across the icy stone of the platform and vanished over the edge with a despairing wail.

From Abaddon's right came a shout, barely audible over the wind.

'For the Emperor!'

A grenade launcher thumped. Abaddon span, faster than any being in such massive armour had a right to. He deflected the incoming grenade with the flat of Drach'nyen and it

detonated in the midst of a cluster of luckless Cadians. He felt a surge of indignation from the daemon blade at being put to such base use, and sneered contemptuously.

The Cadian cranked a handle to cycle his weapon's drum feed, but his panic caused his hands to shake and he fumbled the weapon. Drach'nyen licked out like a viper's tongue and punched tip first through the man's skull. Blood drizzled onto the black snow. The grenade launcher fell from nerveless fingers. Abaddon ripped his blade free even as more lasbolts flashed around him, spinning to slice the head from one Cadian and open the chest of another in a single cut.

He kicked aside the squad's autocannon and hammered bolt fire into yet more Cadian soldiers. Bodies burst and fell. Artificial light spilled over Abaddon as armoured fire-slits clanked open in the surface of the blast door. Lasgun barrels poked out, and a fresh volley of shots struck him.

The Bringers of Despair were just emerging from the snows, their front runners stepping onto the ledge, when Abaddon gave a wordless roar and charged the blast door. He did not deign to use a weapon against the barrier. He simply hit it, shoulder first, and it crumpled like foil.

The next moments were a whirlwind of screaming faces, spraying blood and fragile Human bodies trapped in the confines of a rocky corridor with the Despoiler's wrath. Those not crushed by the collapsing blast door were slain within moments of its fall. Then Abaddon was stepping over the heaped bodies and striding onward. Lumen domes set into the stone ceiling provided illumination. Glowing thermo-panels and smouldering braziers provided heat. The trappings of Imperial faith were everywhere, from statues of saints hunching in crystalline alcoves to the fibreweave tapestries depicting faithful scenes whose asininity made Abaddon grit his teeth.

A wide space opened ahead. It was a huge chamber hollowed out of the living stone, with graven prayer benches and a huge, angel-winged idol that looked millennia old. Stalactites hung from the ceiling almost all the way to the floor throughout the space. Each was painted with intricate, faded designs and strung about with streamers of brightly hued cloth.

The sombre grace of the prayer chamber was marred by a wall of flakboard barricades thrown up across its middle, blocking access to the tunnel mouths behind them. Abaddon saw dozens of Cadians crouched behind the defensive line, their guns trained squarely upon him.

He did not duck back as the loyalists opened fire, as their barrage chopped apart irreplaceable stalactites and blew chunks from stonework that had been old when the Imperium was still young. Instead he simply motioned for his Terminators to advance, standing firm in the face of the Imperial firestorm as his Bringers of Despair stomped past him to either side. More power-armoured Black Legionnaires followed the elite warriors, spreading out on their flanks and laying down covering fire.

Abaddon was about to join the onslaught when his gorget vox tolled. The voice that issued from it was part furnace rumble, part churning iron gears.

'There is an unforeseen complexity.'

Scowling, Abaddon stepped back into the corridor. As he did so the lumen globe above him flickered and turned sullen red. A stench of sulphur rose from the nearby braziers while, on the ground around his feet, the sundered wargear of slain soldiers began to writhe with silvery nematodes. As Abaddon watched, the questing worms started to drag broken lasguns and a cracked auspex towards one another, the metal bubbling and running together like molten flesh. He curled his lip.

'Speak quickly and plainly, daemon. I am already mired in battle resolving the last complexity you detected.'

'My imps see much that others do not,' Vashtorr replied. *'They are my receptors, my sensors, my auspex and inload. My imps chatter to me of a fragment locked within the heart of a clarion world that is bathed in the light of twinned stars. It is a fragment that we must have for our endeavour, but whose acquisition has become more complicated.'*

Abaddon's eidetic memory conjured a name from the details Vashtorr had provided. His scowl deepened.

'You speak of Malakbael. What has happened?'

'Desperation. Innovation. The most fascinating risks have been taken in the name of progress.' There was undisguised relish in Vashtorr's voice, despite the bad news he was delivering. *'Unexpected machinations see the foe amass a force about Malakbael too great for any Balefleet to overcome. Their entire fourth crusade fleet gathers about that site like filings to a magnet. Acquisition cannot be achieved.'*

Abaddon could not help himself. The laughter stole up his throat and escaped his lips, hard and cruel. He felt a species of delight at the revelation that this daemon demigod was not as omniscient as it sought to appear.

'Account for your mirth.' The irritation in Vashtorr's tone was as clear as the pleasure of a moment before.

'It does not matter how many armies the corpse-worshippers amass at Malakbael. The fates have been cruel indeed to those loyalist lapdogs.

Sainted Guilliman himself could take the field there. He still would not stop what is coming for them.'

'Of what do you speak, Warmaster? What power has been unleashed against Malakbael?'

The daemon sounded wary. As *well it might*, thought Abaddon. He felt a cruel smile twist his features as he spoke a single word, two syllables that had spelled the death of civilisations, the annihilation of worlds, the murder of entire species.

'Angron.'

The word left his lips like a curse. It struck the air like a fist and left silence in its wake for several slow beats of Abaddon's twin hearts. When Vashtorr spoke again, he sounded calculating, intrigued.

'I will go. I will witness this for myself.'

'Do that, only do not trouble me again without good cause,' said Abaddon. 'I have my own battles to fight.'

He went to cut the vox channel, but Vashtorr's influence had already withdrawn. The writhing tendrils binding the Imperial wargear together withered, leaving the half-melded lumps of fleshmetal to fall apart again with a clatter. The lumen dome above Abaddon's head burned fierce white for a moment and emitted a rising whine before bursting with a bang. Ignoring the rain of shattered glass, Abaddon clenched the Talon of Horus, hefted Drach'nyen and strode out to join the butchery.

The fight for the Temple Ultima took almost another hour to conclude. Under Abaddon's leadership, Black Legion forces flowed in through the sundered Ascensor's Gate. Meanwhile, other lesser warbands prevented loyalist reinforcements from breaking through via Mount Sanctic, or fighting their way up the Devoted Stair from Saint Tathusa's Vale. Reports flickered through Abaddon's vox as he fought, his lieutenants reporting their successes to him as the battle for Chyron Tertius played out; orbital dominance had been achieved, the last of the loyalist defence monitors tumbling away into the planet's atmosphere on wings of fire; the loyalist armour push along the Penitents' Pass had

been blunted by an onslaught of mongrel Possessed, before blasting charges brought the mountainsides down to block any further assaults; the Tempestus Scions attempting a counter-assault via the peak of Mount Imperator had landed only a handful of squads before flocks of Heldrakes tore their drop craft from the skies.

It was that surviving handful of Imperial troops who provided the final line of resistance to Abaddon's assault. As he strode up the sweeping gold and marble steps that led to the Shrine of the God-Emperor, it was their disciplined volleys that greeted him. Las-fire seared the air. Bolt shells slammed into carapace-armoured bodies. Plasma blasts detonated like miniature suns.

The Scions were well dug in behind marble balustrades and onyx statues at the head of the stairs. Already, the bodies of several Legionnaires sprawled upon the steps, their missing heads and melted chestplates testament to the ferocity of the loyalist firepower. Abaddon activated his vox even as he stepped over the dead and blasted a Scion from her feet with a volley of bolts.

'Now,' he commanded.

The air crackled. Corposant crawled across the bodies of the dead. Scions span, giving cries of alarm as columns of infernal energy erupted around them. Hulking forms resolved as the teleport flares died away. Fleshmetal slithered and contorted as the newly materialised Obliterators levelled their guns and opened fire at point-blank range.

'Forward, to victory!' roared Abaddon. As a storm of flame and plasma engulfed the Scions, he pounded up the steps at the head of his warriors. Drach'nyen drank deep of loyalist blood. The Scions' commanding officer died with Abaddon's talon rammed through his chest. The towering doors of the Shrine of the God-Emperor crashed down in flames, the priceless images painted across them in lost millennia bubbling and peeling to ash.

Abaddon marched through the fire with his warriors at his heels. The magnificence of the shrine was utterly lost upon him. He cared nothing for the soaring pillars and arches, the artfully carved skylights or the many-hued braids of prayer banners that criss-crossed the vaulted ceiling. His eyes roved across but did not see the serene beauty of the ancient shrine as he sought a sight of his prize.

'Bring up the witches,' he ordered. Moments passed as he stood waiting, crimson light dancing in the skylights as the bombardment from on high continued. Distantly, Abaddon heard the roar of battles still being fought – last, desperate attempts by the loyalists to prevent his victory.

'Too slow, too late,' he murmured. 'So predictable.'

Insectile clicking and the rasp of ragged breath announced the arrival of the slave-psykers. Abaddon turned to see that it was Xorphas himself who had brought them, a pack of three barely Human symbiotes straining at leashes of chain and flayed skin.

'Find it.' said Abaddon.

'Without delay, Lord Warmaster,' replied Xorphas, making a show of releasing the slave-psykers from their tethers.

Ignoring the gaudy reliquary illuminated by hundreds of candles at the shrine's heart, the twisted witches instead shambled across to one of the stone pillars near the eastern edge. There they hunched, the moistened antennae of their daemonic helms twitching with febrile excitement.

A blow from Drach'nyen was sufficient. The false facing collapsed in a shower of age-old plaster dust. Revealed behind, nestled within the hollow pillar, was a marble plinth that Abaddon guessed had last seen daylight millennia before. Atop it sat a simple stone chalice, dusty with age. The bas-relief carvings that wound about it might have been blades, or spears, or perhaps even much-eroded representations of trees.

'That is what we seek? So mean a trifle,' observed Xorphas.

'And yet, it is by such mean trifles that the Imperium of Mankind shall finally be laid low,' said Abaddon, as he felt a presentiment of triumph burn within his hearts.

‘We look upon millennia past and believe ourselves old. The Dark Age of Technology seems impossibly ancient to us, its terrors atavistic and promethean. Yet all our span is but a stutter of the galaxy’s pulse. Deeper and darker by far yawns the abyss of prehistory beneath our feet. Who can say what timeless horrors lurk in its depths, awaiting the hour of their return?’

- Alfredus of Theng, cryptohistoritor and philosophus prime to the Governor of Lorvek II

The Rules

'I have not fought for thousands of years to see all consumed in a mindless inferno that turns even ambition and vengeance to ash. The galaxy will burn, but understand this – it will burn by my hand, and mine alone.'

- Abaddon the Despoiler, upon the launch of the first Arks of Omen

BOARDING ACTIONS

Boarding Actions is a new expansion for Warhammer 40,000, offering players of all kinds an exciting and unique way to experience the battles of the 41st Millennium. These simple rules additions will allow you to take your forces deep into the dark interiors and hidden spaces of the war-torn galaxy for both matched play and narrative play. Featuring pre-set terrain and compact armies, you can dive straight into brutal close-quarters combat quickly, with fast and furious matches often allowing you to play out several battles over the course of a single gaming session.

While many Warhammer 40,000 battles feature large armies clashing on the field of battle, Boarding Action missions allow you to play out those crucial assaults that can turn the tide of the greater conflict. Boarding Action armies will also look different to what you might be used to. Your forces will not have access to the Warlord Traits, Relics and Stratagems featured in your Codex, but can instead utilise a new range of bespoke options specifically tailored to this deadly form of combat. Over the coming books in the series this will be expanded upon with Faction-specific content and rules. As such, even veteran Warhammer 40,000 players will find an array of new options and challenges to truly sink their teeth into.

The missions featured in this book are also designed to be balanced and offer a fair challenge to both sides. Victory will come to those who best adapt to their environment and achieve their objectives, and can sometimes even be seized despite the loss of an entire boarding force!

BOARDING ACTIONS TERRAIN

Besides the book that you are currently holding, in order to take your forces out to fight amongst the stars, you will need to pick up a copy of the Warhammer 40,000: Boarding Actions Terrain Set.

This set provides everything that you see here, with a myriad of different wall pieces, hatchways and architectural elements included. In addition, it also contains two fully detailed game boards depicting the crumbling decking and pipework of the ships you are fighting aboard – everything you need to begin battling your way across the void craft of the 41st Millennium.

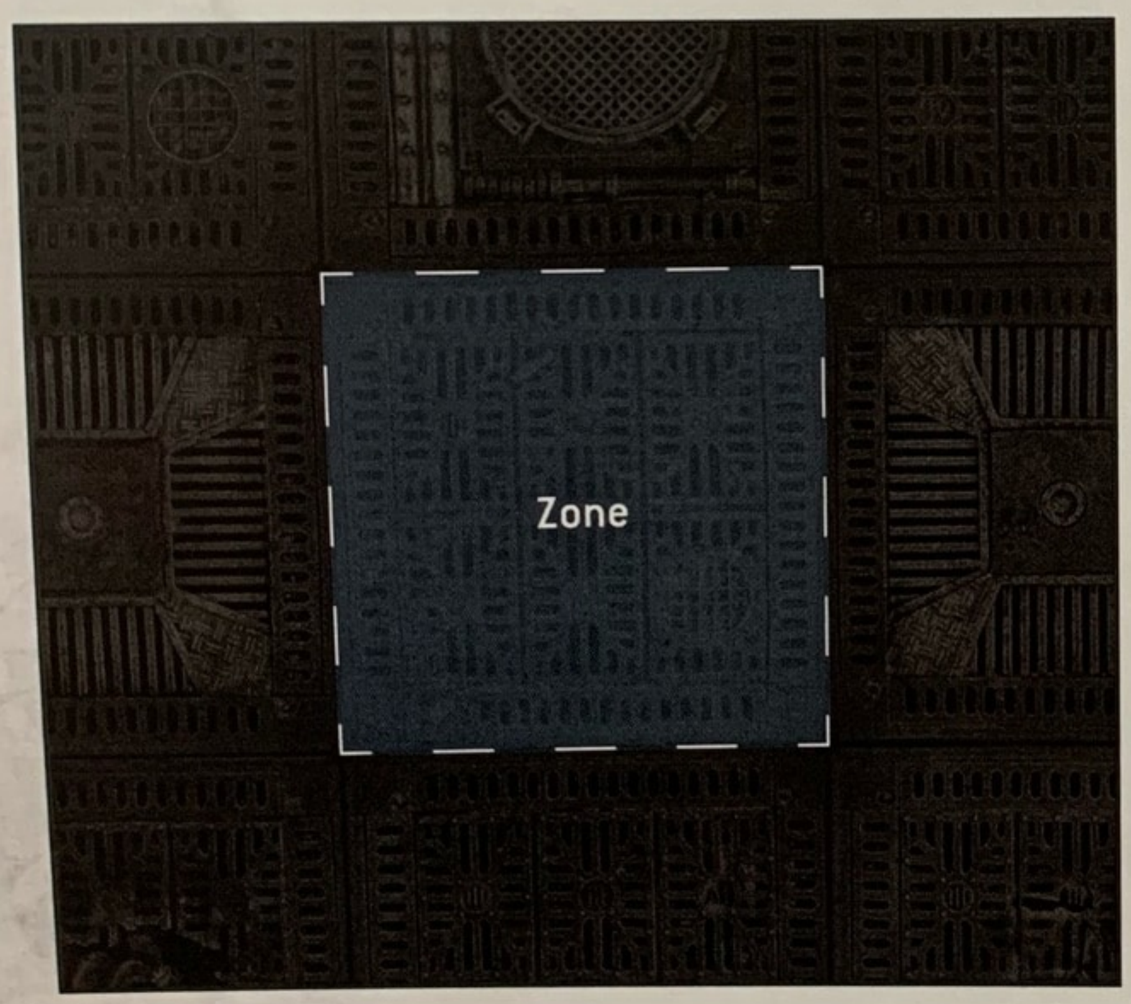
BOARDING ACTION BATTLEFIELDS

Boarding Action battles involve a series of new components that differ from those you may have used in other games of Warhammer 40,000. Additional details on how to use these can be found below.

BOARDING ACTION BOARDS

When fighting a Boarding Action battle, your battlefield will be made up of two Boarding Action game boards, laid side by side to create the battlefield area. Each mission will contain a mission map that not only shows you the important details required to play that mission, but also shows the layout of the two game boards and how they should be set up. In some missions this will be so that they are touching, but in others, it may require the two game boards to be separated.

Each game board is made up of a series of squares, called Zones, like the one shown below.



These squares will often be used to denote certain areas of the battlefield, most commonly Entry Zones, which are used when setting up your units on the battlefield.

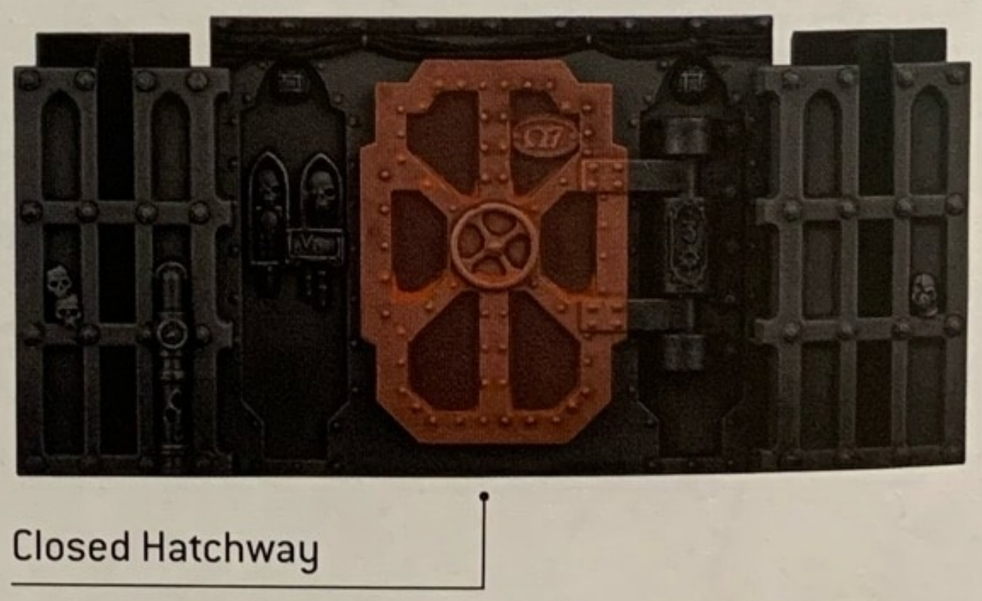
'Bjarni, secure that door, and if anything with more than two arms comes through it you give it a taste of your flamer!'

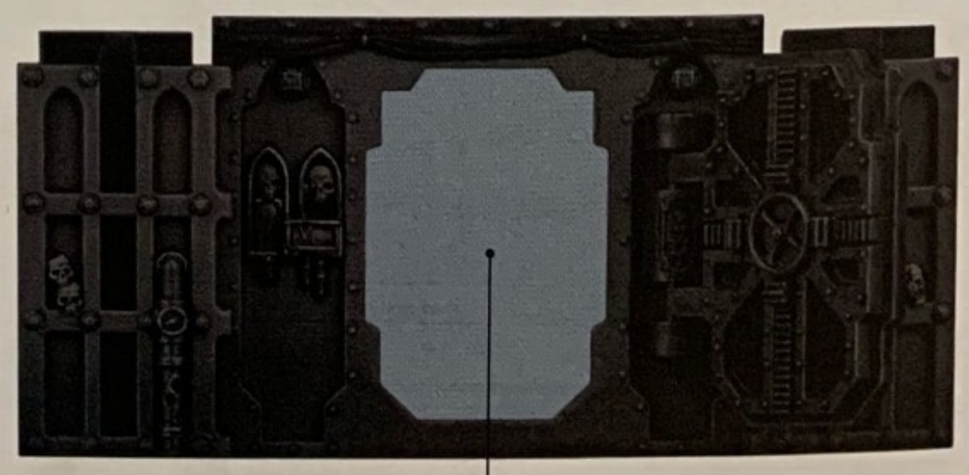
- Wolf Guard Battle Leader Fenryk , during the purging of the Space Hulk Dwimmerbeast

BOARDING ACTION TERRAIN

Most of the terrain in Boarding Action games consists of Walls (which includes any attached Pillars) and in amongst these will be Hatchways, which can be opened. An example of such a piece of scenery is shown below.

Hatchways can be in one of two states – closed and open. When a Hatchway is closed, it will prevent movement and visibility. When a Hatchway is open, models will be able to move freely through it and see through.



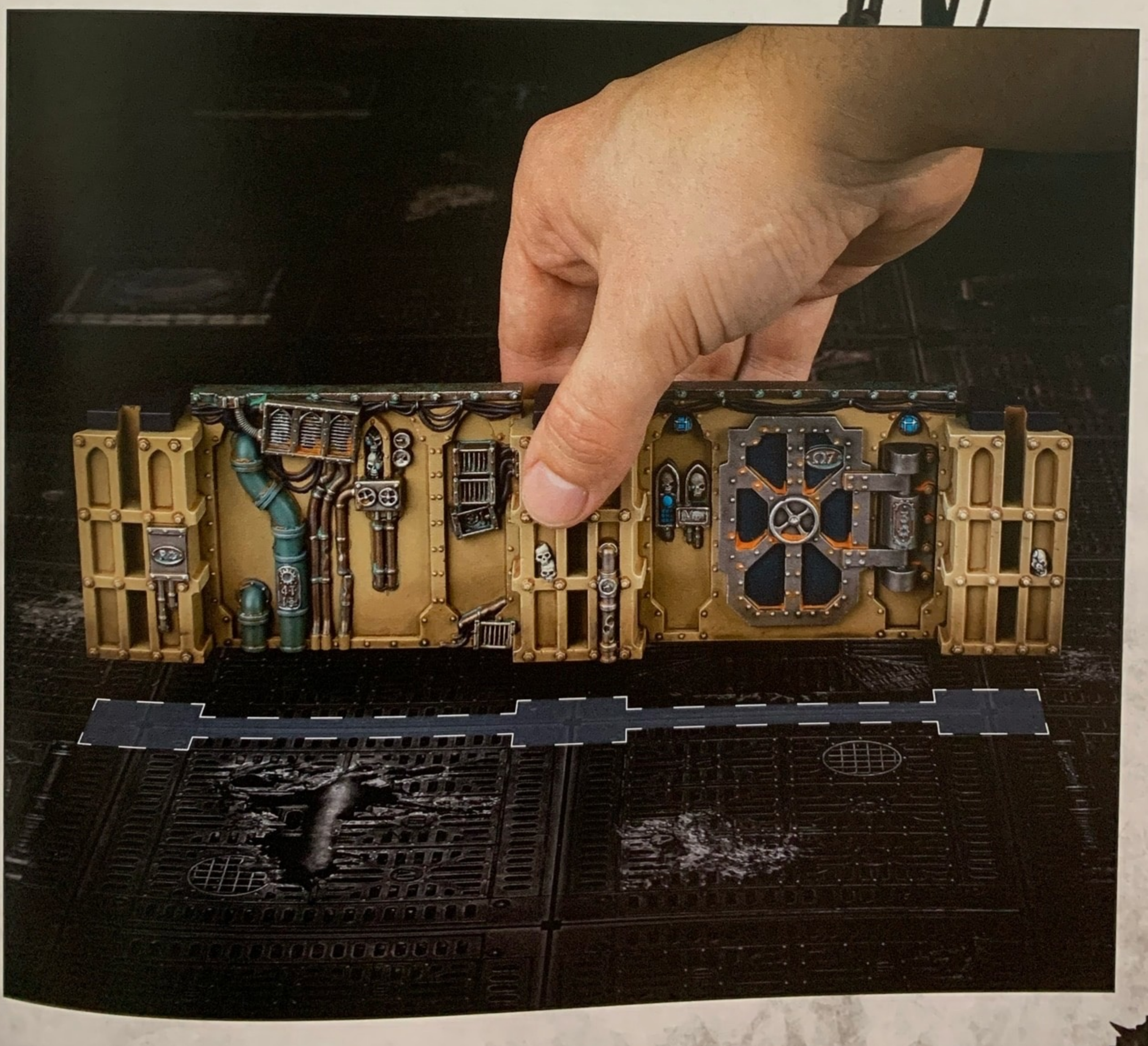


SET UP

You will no doubt have noticed by now that Boarding Action battles use unique terrain to lay out the claustrophobic corridors of the spacecraft where your fights will take place. This terrain is highly modular and can be clipped together in a large number of different configurations. If you are playing one of the Boarding Action missions presented in this book, the mission map will also show you where to set up the terrain features, along with the positions of each Hatchway.

Each piece of terrain on the mission map will be coded, allowing you to quickly identify which piece it corresponds to, and where that piece should be positioned on the game boards. You can find a key denoting the code for each piece on pages 68 and 69. We also recommend painting or writing the codes for each wall piece onto the underside of that piece – this will allow you to identify them quickly when setting up your game.

When placing these terrain pieces on the game board, the Wall sections line up with the lines between the Zones on the board and any Pillars line up with the smaller squares in the corner of each Zone, as shown below.



BOARDING ACTION RULES

In this section you will find a number of additional rules or amendments to the Core Rules for Warhammer 40,000 that are used when fighting Boarding Action battles.

Boarding Actions is an expansion to Warhammer 40,000. As such, unless otherwise specified on the following pages, all of the Warhammer 40,000 Core Rules, as well as those found in Codexes and other supplementary publications, apply to battles fought using this expansion.

CRUSADE BATTLES

The rules and missions presented in this book can be used to play battles with your Crusade force in the normal way – your units still have all of their Battle Honours, Battle Scars and other upgrades as they would in any other game. However, some of the Agendas found within various publications are not appropriate for Boarding Action games, either because they reference rules mechanics that do not exist in these battles, such as deployment zones, or because narratively they do not fit with the environment. We recommend players have a discussion before the game to mutually agree which Agendas from their factions are appropriate for the game they are about to play.

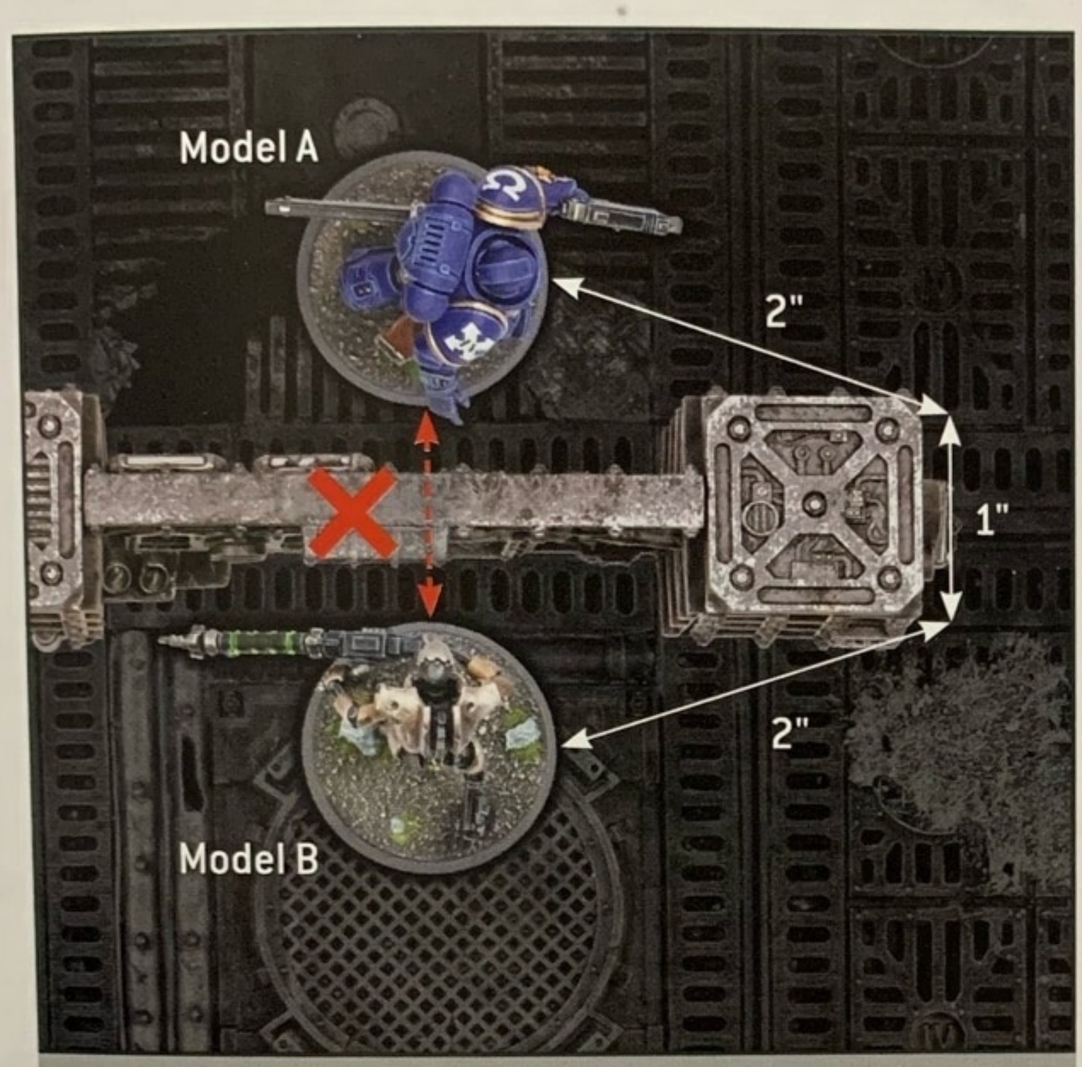
BATTLE-FORGED CP BONUS AND STRATAGEMS

In Boarding Action battles, at the start of each player's Command phase, before doing anything else, both players gain 1 Command point (CP).

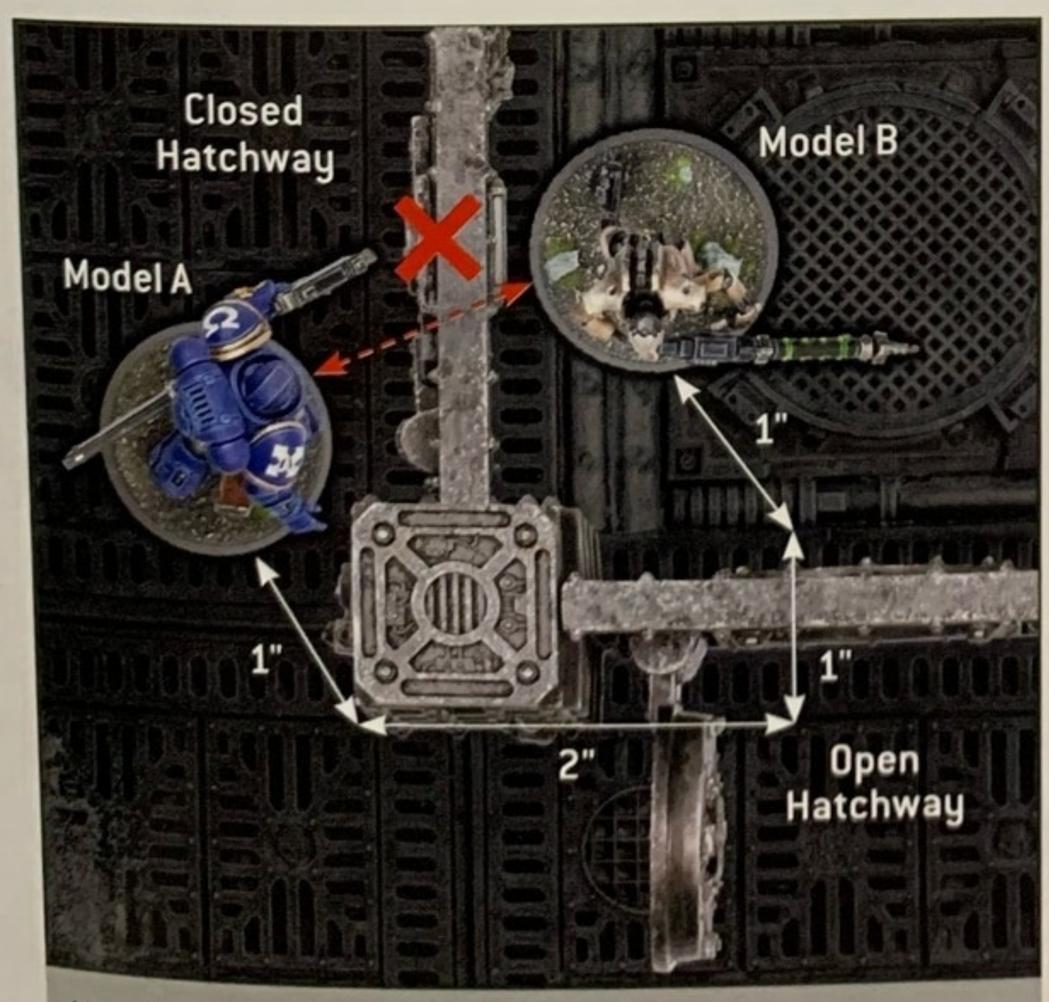
Players can use their Command points to use Boarding Action Stratagems (that is, any Stratagem with the Boarding Action label). Players cannot use any other Stratagems.

MEASUREMENT

When measuring the distance between models in Boarding Action games, measure between the closest points of the bases of the models you're measuring to and from. You cannot measure through Walls or closed Hatchways – instead you must measure the closest path around these. If you cannot trace a path between two models, those models are considered to be an infinite distance apart. All other distances are measured in a straight line as normal. Note that the Pillar pieces on the ends of the Walls are still considered a part of the Wall.



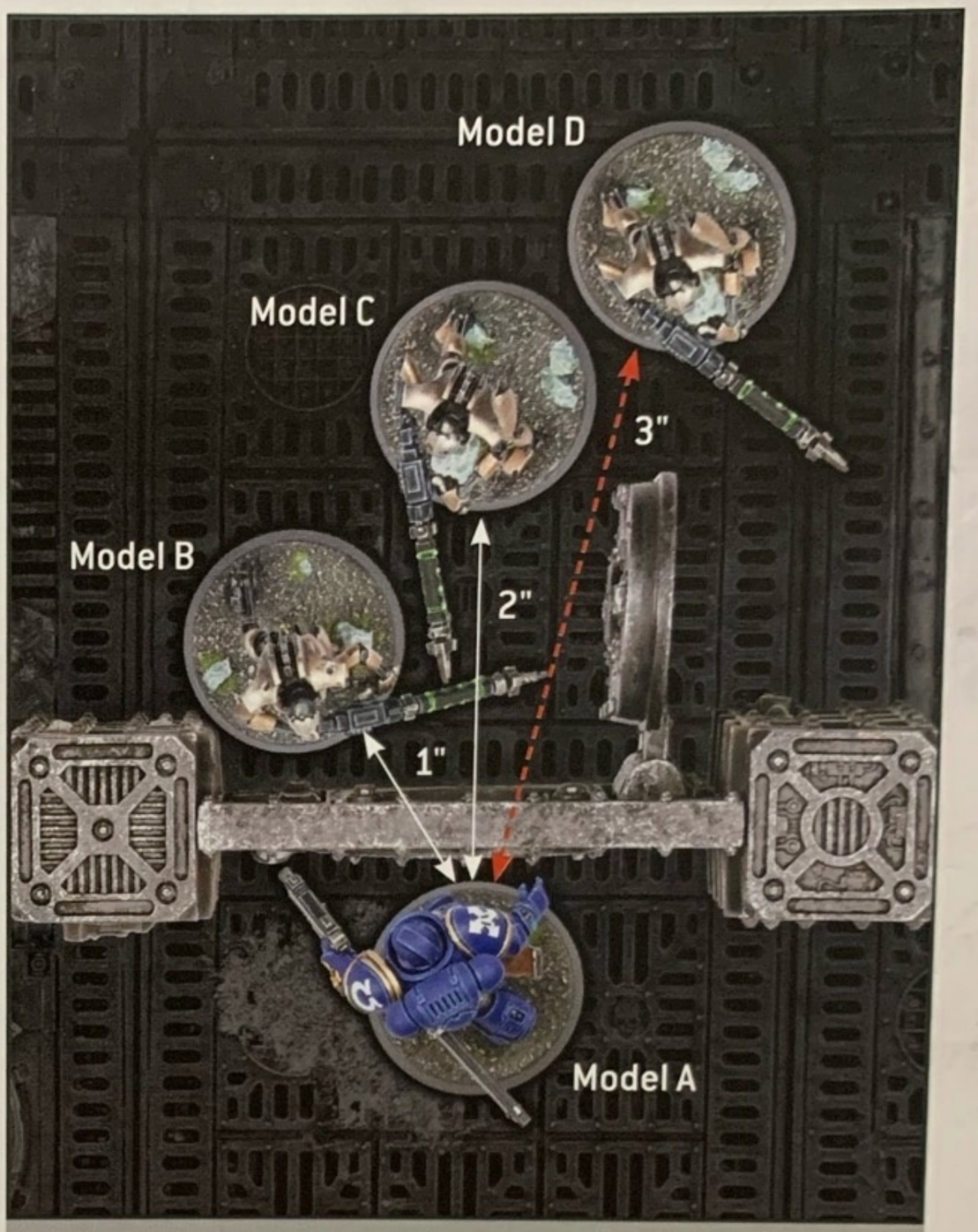
Model A and Model B are 5" apart, as the Wall cannot be measured through (indicated by the dashed red line).



Model A and Model B are 5" apart, as the Hatchway on the left is closed and so cannot be measured through (indicated by the dashed line), however, the Hatchway on the right is open and so can be measured through.

ENGAGEMENT RANGE

When measuring to see if one model is within Engagement Range of another, if the shortest line between those two models passes through an open Hatchway, then those models are within Engagement Range if they are within 2" of one another, as shown below.



- Both Models B and C are within Engagement Range of Model A, as the shortest distance between them passes through an open Hatchway and they are within 2" of one another.
- However, Model D is not within 2" of Model A and so these two are not within Engagement Range.

'Run, corpse-worshippers. Flee my talons. Hide, if you think that you can. So many shadows. So many twists and turns. Around which corner will you meet me, suddenly, transfixed by my glowing eyes, pierced by my bloodied claws? Flee from me. Let me have my sport. The hunt has begun, and you are naught but prey.'

- Kreyvar Shrann, Night Lords champion

VISIBILITY

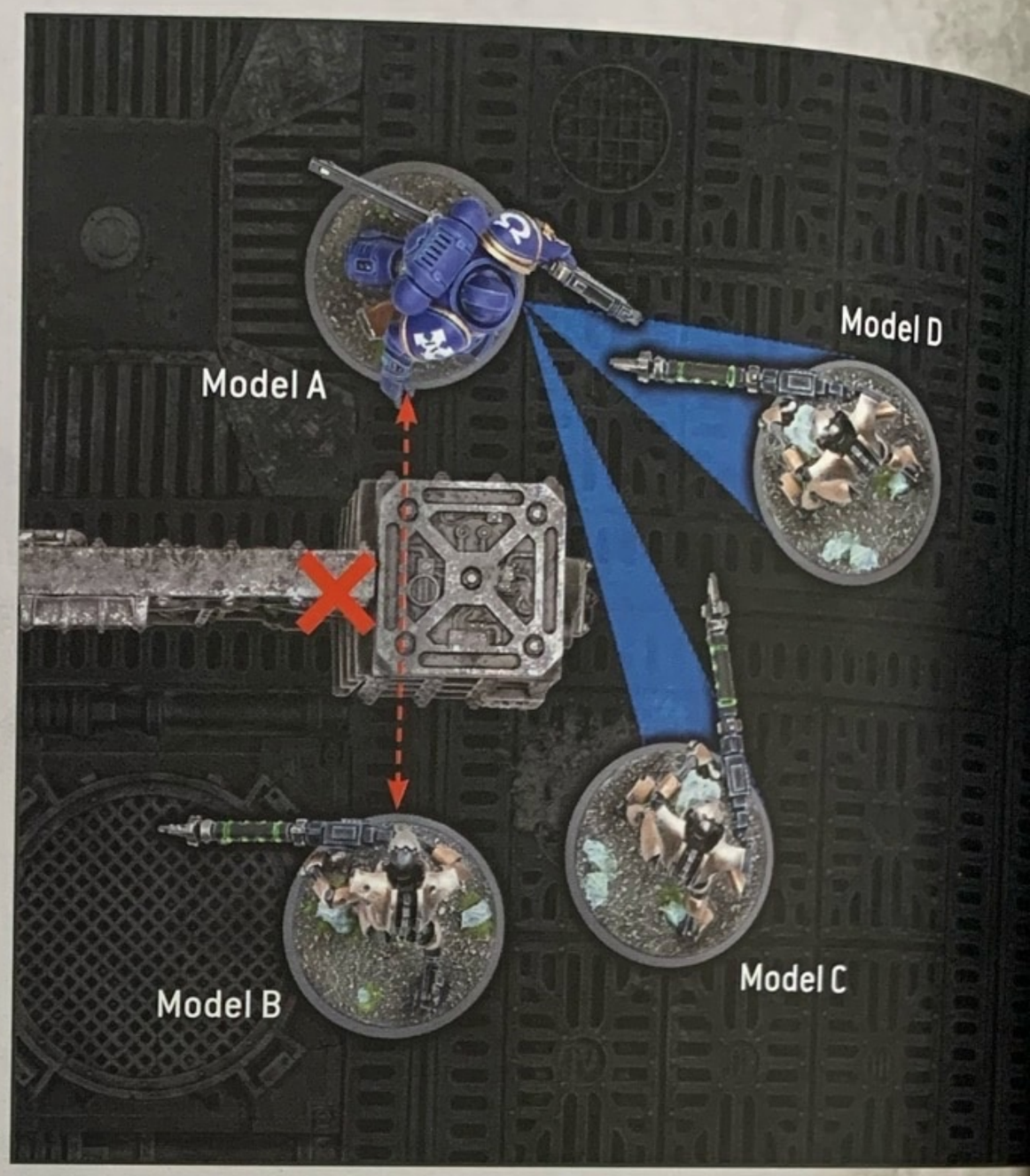
In Boarding Actions, a model is visible to an observing model if you can trace a straight line from any part of its base to any part of the observing model's base, without that line passing through any of the following:

- A Wall
- A closed Hatchway
- A model that is not part of the observed model's unit

Note that the Hatch of an opened Hatchway does not block any of these visibility lines. If you can draw a straight line to every part of a model's base from any part of an observing model's base, as described above, then that model is said to be fully visible to the observing model.

If one or more models in a unit are visible, then the unit is said to be visible to the observing model. If every model in a unit is fully visible to an observing model, then that unit is said to be fully visible to the observing model.

Visibility around Walls



ALLOCATING ATTACKS

When playing Boarding Actions, the Allocate Attack step of the attack sequence is replaced with the following:

If an attack successfully wounds the target unit, the player commanding the target unit allocates that attack to one model in the target unit, as follows:

If a model in the target unit has already lost one or more wounds, or has already had attacks allocated to it during this phase, the attack must be allocated to that model. Note that it does not matter if that model is within range or Engagement Range of, or visible to, the attacking models. Otherwise:

- If that attack is a ranged attack, then that attack must be allocated to a model that is visible to any model in the shooting unit. If there is no such model, the attack sequence ends.
- If that attack is a melee attack, that attack can be allocated to any model in the target unit. Note that this does not have to be a model that is within Engagement Range of the attacking models.

BENEFITS OF COVER

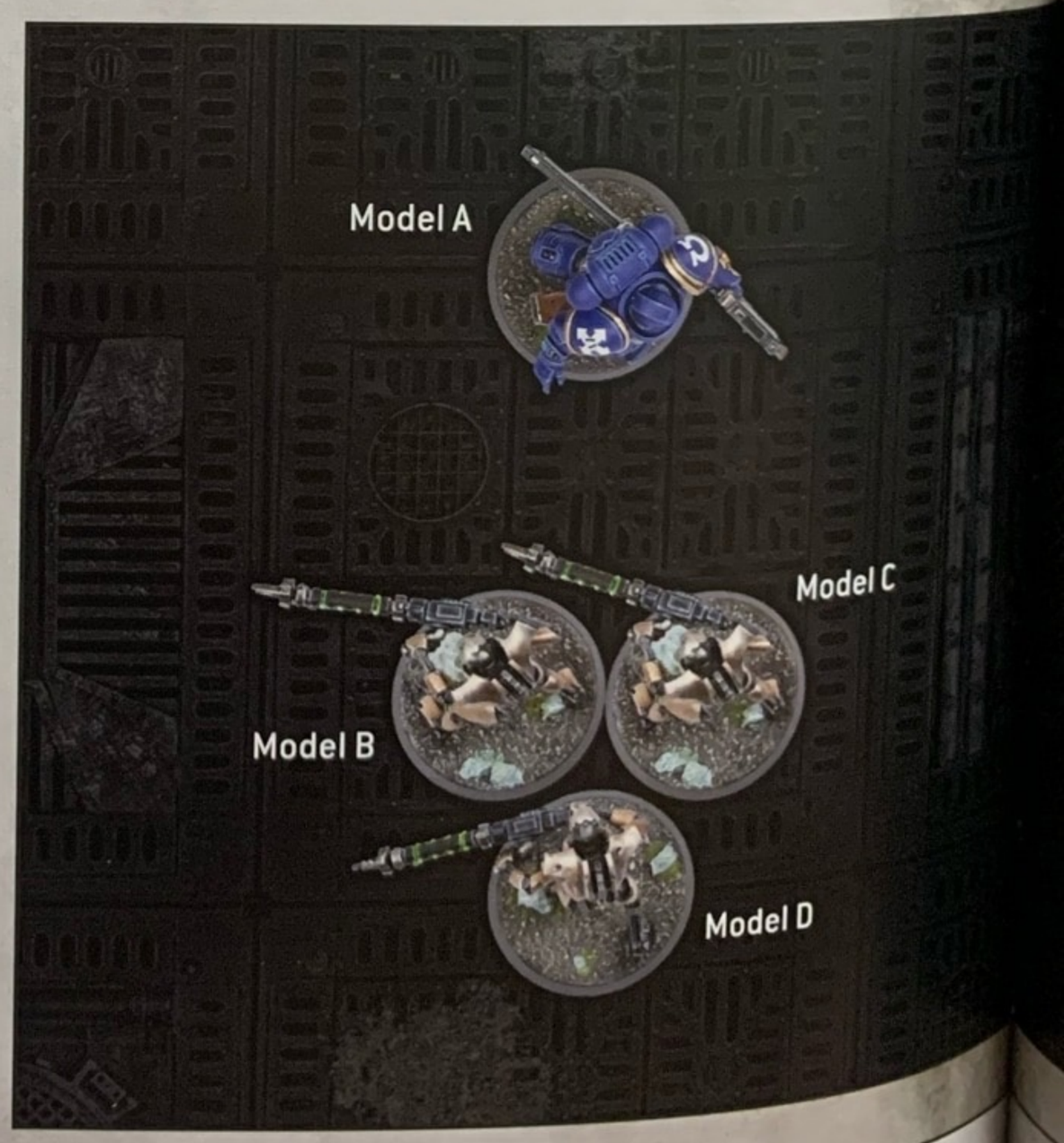
Each time a ranged attack is allocated to a model, that model will receive the benefits of cover against that attack unless it is fully visible to any models in the attacker's unit. While a model is receiving the benefits of cover against an attack, add 1 to the saving throw made against that attack (invulnerable saving throws are not affected).

In addition to any rules that say the target of an attack does not receive the benefits of cover against that attack, this benefit will not apply to any attack that is affected by a rule that says the target does not receive the benefits of Light Cover or Dense Cover.

WEAPONS THAT CAN BE FIRED EVEN IF THE TARGET IS NOT VISIBLE

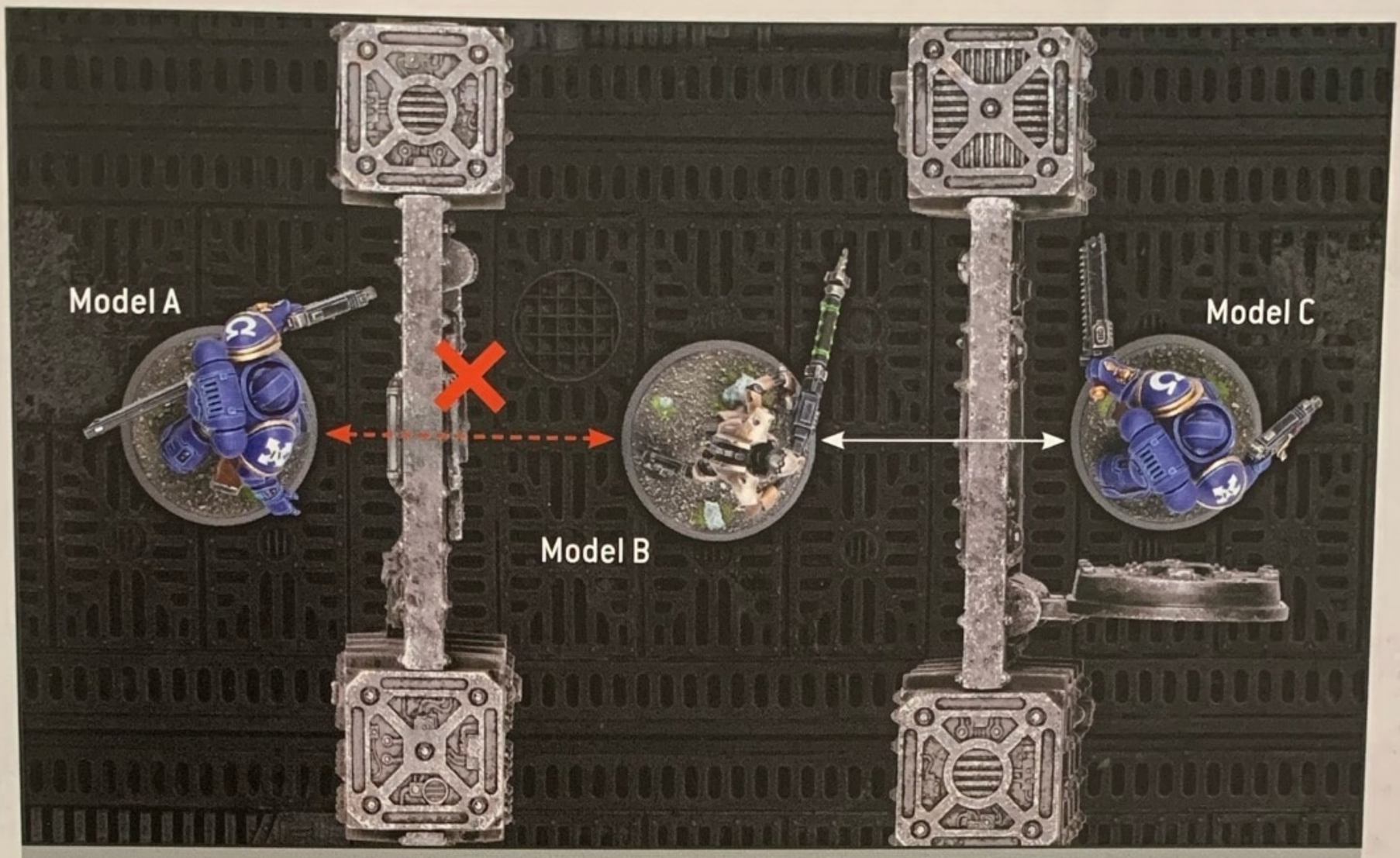
Many weapons, such as mortars, can target and resolve attacks at units that are not visible to the firing model. In Boarding Actions, you can never make use of such rules – the target must always be visible to the firing model.

Visibility through models in the same unit



Visibility through Hatchways

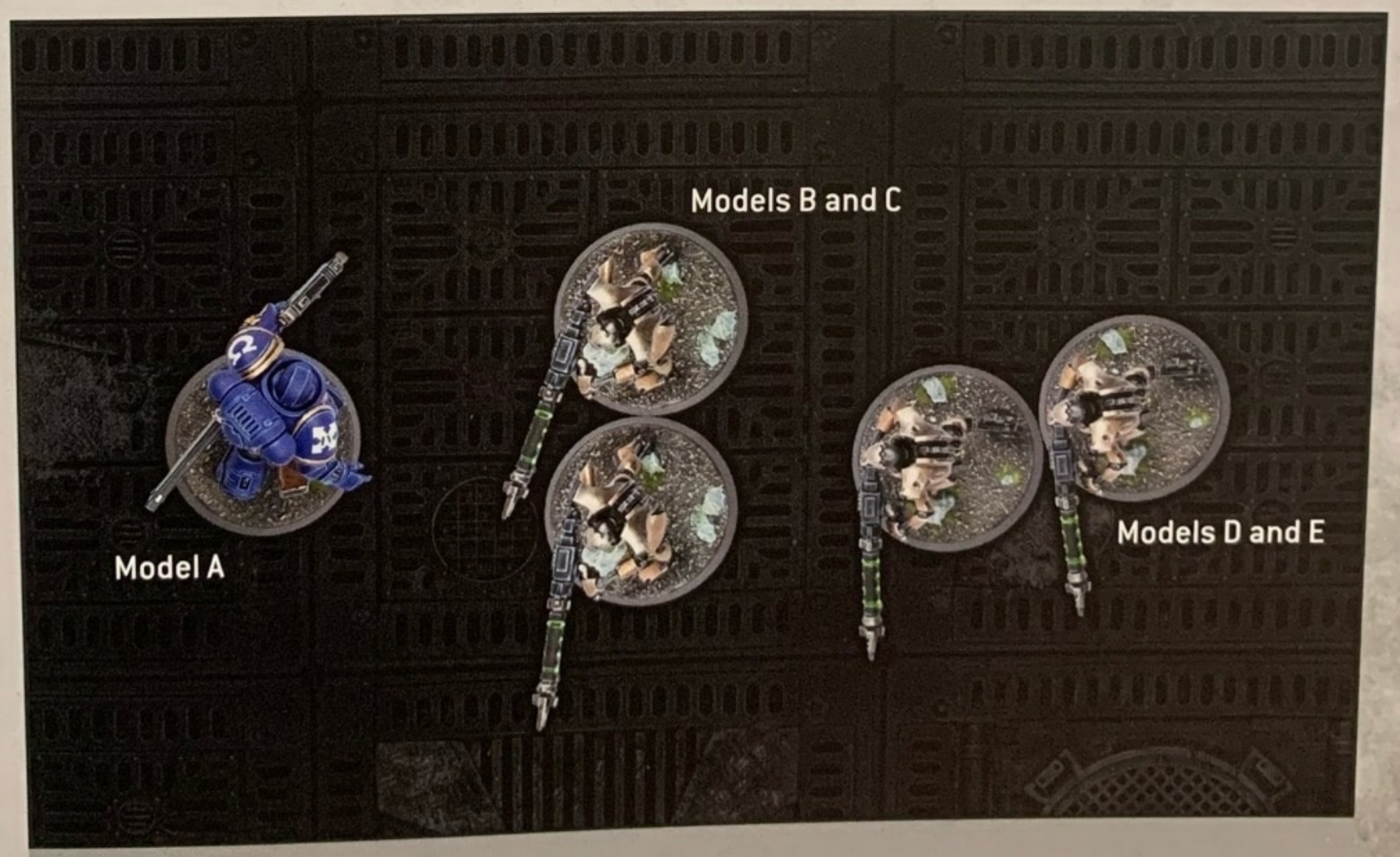
- Model A cannot see Model B as it is not possible to draw a line from Model A's base to Model B's base without it passing through a Wall.
- Model A can see Model C as a line can be drawn, but part of Model C is still hidden from Model A by the Wall. As such, it will receive the benefits of cover against ranged attacks made by Model A.
- Model A can completely see Model D, and so Model D would not receive the benefits of cover.



- Model B cannot see Model A as it is not possible to draw a line from Model B's base to Model A's base without it passing through either a Wall or a closed Hatchway.
- Model B can see Model C as such a line can be drawn through an open Hatchway.

Visibility through models in different units

- Models B, C and D are all from the same unit.
- When Model D's unit is selected to shoot, Model D cannot make any ranged attacks against Model A, as it is not possible to draw a line between their bases without it passing through Models B or C.
- However, when Model A is selected to shoot, because Models B and C are part of the same unit as Model D, Model D is considered visible for the purposes of allocating attacks to it.
- Model D is fully visible to Model A, and so Model D would not receive the benefits of cover.



- Models B and C are from one unit. Models D and E are from another, different unit.
- When Model A is selected to shoot, it cannot make any ranged attacks against Model D's unit, as it is not possible to draw a line between their bases without it passing through Models B or C, which are not part of Model D's unit.

MOVEMENT AND OPEN HATCHWAYS

Models can move through open Hatchways without hindrance, even if their base is wider than that of the Hatchway, but a model cannot end a move with its base in the middle of an open Hatchway. The Hatch of an open Hatchway is ignored for movement purposes.

OBJECTIVE MARKERS

In Boarding Actions, objective markers should have a diameter of 40mm. A model is within range of an objective marker if it is within 1" of that objective marker.

At the start of the battle, each objective marker on the battlefield is contested, and so is not controlled by either player. Unless otherwise noted, a player will control an objective marker at the end of any phase if they have more models within range of it than their opponent does.

WITCHFIRE PSYCHIC POWERS

Each time a Witchfire psychic power is manifested, only units that are visible to the **PSYKER** manifesting that power can suffer any mortal wounds. If a psychic power would inflict mortal wounds on the closest enemy model or unit, and that enemy is not visible to the **PSYKER**, then that power affects the closest visible enemy model or unit (as appropriate) instead.

CHARGING

In Boarding Actions, a unit can only select a unit as a target of a charge if it is visible to the charging unit.

HEROIC INTERVENTIONS

In Boarding Actions, a unit that is eligible to perform a Heroic Intervention can only do so if the closest enemy unit is visible to it.

PILE-IN AND CONSOLIDATION MOVES

In Boarding Actions, each time a unit piles in or consolidates, the first model moved must end its move within Engagement Range of at least one enemy model, and each time a model makes a consolidation move, it must end that move within Engagement Range of a model that was visible to its unit when it started that move. If this is impossible, no models in the unit can make a pile-in or consolidation move this phase.

'Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Let flow the blessed blood of the machine.

Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Holy are the wires along which dances the motive force.

Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, May the oxygen vents bring breath to unworthy lungs.

Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Forth plasma! Forth aqua! Forth linguis binharicus!

See divine void vessel soar!'

- Excerpt, Ninety-ninth rite of void ship unberthing

ACTIONS

In Boarding Actions, units can use the following actions.

SECURE SITE

One or more units from your army with the Objective Secured ability (see the Warhammer 40,000 Core Book) can start to perform this action at the end of the Move Units step of your Movement phase, if they are within range of an objective marker that has no enemy models within range of it. Each unit performing this action must be within range of a different objective marker. The action is completed at the start of your next Command phase, provided the unit performing it is still within range of that objective marker. If completed, that objective marker remains under your control until the end of the battle, unless your opponent controls it at the end of any subsequent phase, even if there are no models from your army within range of it.

SET OVERWATCH

One or more units from your army can start to perform this action at the end of the Move Units step of your Movement phase. The action is completed at the end of your turn. If completed, until the end of your opponent's next turn, that unit is said to have Set Overwatch. Each time an enemy unit is set up on the battlefield or ends a Normal Move, an Advance move, a Fall Back move, a charge move, or opens a Hatchway, units from your army that have Set Overwatch can fire Overwatch at that enemy unit.

Overwatch is resolved like a normal shooting attack except that models can only target the enemy unit that has just finished moving, and an unmodified hit roll of 6 is always required for a successful hit roll, irrespective of the firing model's Ballistic Skill or any modifiers. A unit cannot fire Overwatch while enemy units are within Engagement Range of it unless it is firing Overwatch at an enemy unit that has just finished making a charge move within Engagement Range of it. In this case it can do so even if other friendly units are within Engagement Range of the same enemy unit, and it can do so with any ranged weapon it is equipped with (excluding weapons with the Blast ability).

After a unit has fired Overwatch, it must complete the Set Overwatch action again before it can fire Overwatch again.

Hold Steady

Some rules will allow a unit to Hold Steady. If a model makes an Overwatch attack while its unit is under the effects of such a rule, an unmodified hit roll of 5+ for that attack will score a hit.

SET TO DEFEND

One or more units from your army can start to perform this action at the end of the Move Units step of your Movement phase. The action is completed at the end of your turn. If completed, until the end of your opponent's next turn, that unit is said to have Set to Defend. While a unit is Set to Defend, each time a model in that unit makes a melee attack, add 1 to that attack's hit roll.

OPERATE HATCHWAY

One or more units from your army can start to perform this action at the end of the Move Units step of your Movement phase if they are within 1" of a Hatchway. This action can be performed by any unit that is not within Engagement Range of any enemy models, even if that unit is being affected by a rule that would normally prevent it from performing actions. The action is completed at the end of your Movement phase if no enemy models are within 1" of that Hatchway. If there are any enemy models within 1" of that Hatchway, your opponent can attempt to prevent the action from being completed. If they do so, roll off with your opponent; each player adds the Strength characteristic of one of their models that is within 1" of that Hatchway to their respective scores. If you win, the action is completed; otherwise, the action fails. If completed, that Hatchway opens (if it was closed) or closes (if it was open).

If a Hatchway opens and units on opposite sides of that Hatchway now find themselves within Engagement Range of each other, then those units will be eligible to fight during the subsequent Fight phase, but neither of those units count as having made a charge move this turn.

Before opening the Hatchway, Model A and Model B are not within Engagement Range of one another.

After Model A opens the Hatchway, it is within Engagement Range of Model B as the shortest distance between them passes through an open Hatchway and they are within 2" of one another. In the following Fight phase, both units will be eligible to fight, but Model A's unit will not count as having charged that turn.

BOARDING ACTION STRATAGEMS

In Boarding Actions, you cannot use any Stratagems other than those with the Boarding Action label.

COMMAND RE-ROLL 1CP

Boarding Action – Battle Tactic Stratagem

Battle aboard a void ship is anarchic and confusing. Auspicators and map-slates must be watched constantly. Enemy contacts ghost in and out of sight as steam billows in clouds, lumen flicker and gunfire roars on every side. Amidst such conditions, the steady hand of a veteran commander is more important than ever, and can spell the difference between triumph and disaster.

Use this Stratagem after you have made a hit roll, a wound roll, a damage roll, a saving throw, an Advance roll, a charge roll, a Psychic test, a Deny the Witch test or you have rolled the dice to determine the number of attacks made by a weapon. Re-roll that roll, test or saving throw.

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE 2CP

Boarding Action – Strategic Ploy Stratagem

During a boarding action, warriors must be ready for foes to spring upon them from any angle without the slightest warning. For those who stay sufficiently alert, however, the tangled confines and plentiful hazards of shipboard conflict may slow their enemies' charge enough to allow a chance to drive them back.

Use this Stratagem after an enemy unit has fought in this turn. Select one of your eligible units and fight with it next.

INSANE BRAVERY 2CP

Boarding Action – Epic Deed Stratagem

To commit to battle within the claustrophobic corridors and gothic chambers of a void ship necessitates near-suicidal courage, or else sufficient fear of the consequences of refusal. To stand their ground against impossible odds during such a fight requires warriors to exhibit a kind of single-minded madness.

Use this Stratagem before you take a Morale test for a unit from your army. That test is automatically passed. You can only use this Stratagem once.

BOARDING ACTION ENHANCEMENTS

In Boarding Actions, you cannot use any Warlord Traits or Relics. Instead, when you select a Boarding Patrol, your **WARLORD** can be given a single Boarding Action Enhancement from those listed below. Named characters cannot be given a Boarding Action Enhancement.

SUPERIOR BOARDING TACTICS

This leader is a veteran of ship-to-ship battles, directing their forces with ease to secure their objectives and destroy their foes.

Before the battle, in the Generate Starting Command Points step, you start with 2 additional Command points.

CLOSE-QUARTERS KILLER

Exulting in the thrill of close-quarters combat, boarding actions are the natural environment for this commander, whose martial prowess shines when face to face with their foe.

Each time the bearer makes a melee attack, you can re-roll the wound roll.

DEFENSIVE LINCHPIN (AURA)

This leader is expert at setting up deadly overlapping fire patterns amidst labyrinthine corridors, the forces under their command holding their position and driving back their enemies with punishing volleys of fire.

While a friendly unit is within 6" of the bearer, each time a model in that unit fires Overwatch, its unit can Hold Steady (pg 61).

EXPERT BREACHER

This officer has perfected the art of moving their forces swiftly from chamber to chamber and catching the foe off their guard.

The bearer can start to perform the Operate Hatchway action when they are selected to make a Normal Move. If they do so, that action is completed immediately and they cannot perform that action again this turn. Note that if there are enemy units within 1" of that Hatchway, that enemy unit can attempt to prevent the action from completing as normal (regardless of the outcome, the bearer still cannot perform the Operate Hatchway action again this turn).

PERSONAL TELEPORTER

This leader is able to attack their foe from unexpected angles.

When the bearer arrives from Strategic Reserves, you can set it up either wholly within one of your Entry Zones, or anywhere on the battlefield that is more than 9" away from any enemy models.

TRADEMARK WEAPON

This leader wields an iconic weapon whose sheer killing might is guaranteed to fell enemies in short order.

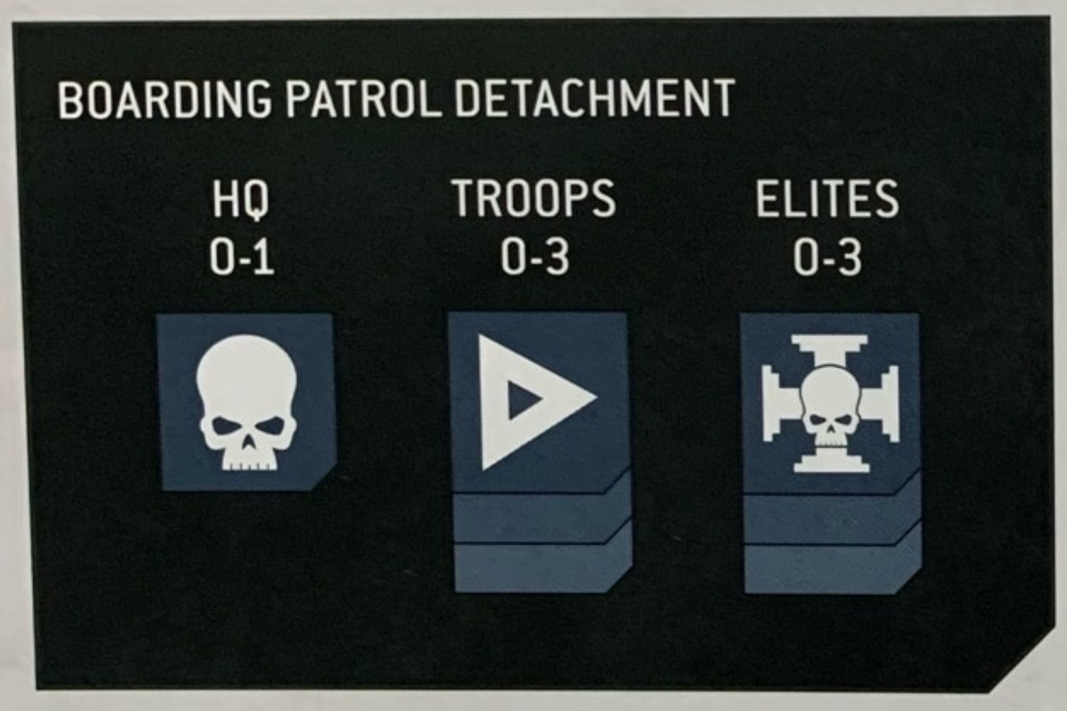
When you select this Enhancement, select one weapon that the bearer is equipped with and make a note of this on your army roster. Increase the Strength and Damage characteristics of that weapon by 1. That weapon is considered to be a Relic for all rules purposes.

MUSTERING A BOARDING PATROL

In order to play a Boarding Action game, you will need to muster a Boarding Patrol. To do so, follow the sequence below. A Boarding Patrol is considered to be a Battle-forged army for all rules purposes.

1. START YOUR ARMY ROSTER

The details of your Boarding Patrol must be recorded on an army roster; this can be written on a piece of paper or recorded digitally. You can download blank army roster sheets from warhammer-community.com. Start by writing down your name, and the name of your army. A Boarding Patrol army always contains a single Boarding Patrol Detachment (see below) and you will then have 500 points to spend on units to add to it, as described below.



2. SELECT FACTION

Select one Faction keyword that is not **Imperium**, **Chaos**, **Aeldari** or **Tyranids**. You cannot include a unit in your Boarding Patrol unless it has this Faction keyword. Your choice of Faction may introduce additional rules, restrictions or exceptions that apply when mustering a Boarding Patrol.

3. SELECT SUB-FACTION RULES

Select all sub-faction rules for your Boarding Patrol (if any) and write down your choices on your army roster. This includes selecting sub-faction keywords (i.e. those presented in angular brackets) and any rules that are determined by your choice of sub-faction (e.g. Detachment abilities, like Chapter Tactics, Obsessions, Regimental Doctrines, etc.).

4. SELECT UNITS

For each box shown on that Detachment, you can select one unit with the required Battlefield Role and add it to that Detachment. You must include at least one unit in this Detachment. Each Elites unit in this Detachment must be different.

- **Select Unit:** Unless the Boarding Action rules for your chosen Faction say otherwise, you cannot include any models in a Boarding Action army that have any of the following keywords: **Monster**, **Vehicle**, **Jump Pack**, **Cavalry**, **Biker**, **Fly**. A Boarding Patrol Detachment can only include one **Character** model.
- **Select Unit Size:** Unless the Boarding Action rules for your chosen Faction say otherwise:
  - If a unit's minimum size is less than 5, you can only include that unit in your Boarding Patrol if it is a minimum sized unit.
  - If a unit's minimum size is 5, you can include that unit as a minimum sized unit, or if it can include additional models, then you can do so as long as the Starting Strength of that unit is 10.
  - You cannot include a unit with a Starting Strength of more than 10 models.
  - You cannot include any Understrength units in your Boarding Patrol.
- **Select Options and Deduct Points:** If that unit has access to any other upgrades or options, you can use them now. Note down the number of models in the unit, any weapons and wargear they have, and the unit's points cost on your army roster. Subtract the unit's total points from your total. If you do not have enough points left, you cannot add that unit to that Detachment.
- **Select Psychic Powers:** If the Detachment contains one or more **Psyker** units that you must select the powers for, do so now. Write down your selections on your army roster.
- **Select Other Rules:** If one or more units in the Detachment have any rules that must, or can be, selected or generated before the battle, you must do so now (e.g. Litanies of Battle, Powers of the C'tan, Prayers to the Dark Gods, etc.).

Some rules involve elements that are determined randomly. If you choose to randomly determine these rules then write 'random' on your army roster for that unit's rule. Then, after players have determined their mission, roll dice in front of your opponent to determine what those rules are.

5. SELECT WARLORD AND ENHANCEMENT

Select one model in your army to be your **Warlord**. This must be a model with the **Character** keyword (if your army includes any). If your army includes no **Character** models, your **Warlord** must be a unit champion model (if your army includes any). Your **Warlord** gains the **Warlord** keyword. If your **Warlord** is a **Character** model (excluding named characters) they gain the Superior Boarding Tactics Enhancement (pg 63). If you wish, you can replace this with a different Boarding Action Enhancement of your choice. You cannot select any other Warlord Traits or Relics for any models in your Boarding Patrol.

6. DETERMINE POINTS TOTAL

Your army roster must list the combined point value of every unit in your army.

Led by the Master of Possession Ozorias the Infernal, this boarding patrol is built as an elite shock assault force, capable of storming swiftly through any enemy defence and ripping the beating heart from the foe.

Ultramarines Captain Acheran has donned Gravis armour to lead his versatile boarding patrol into battle. True to the doctrines of his Chapter, he commands a force adaptable enough to meet any challenge and emerge triumphant.

BOARDING ACTION GAMES

A Boarding Action game is waged by following the sequence below.

1. MUSTER BOARDING PATROL

Players must first muster their Boarding Patrol, as described on page 64. Each player must then provide a copy of their army roster for their opponent to read through. If, when players compare their points total, one player's is at least 30 points less than their opponent's, then the player with the smaller points total is the Underdog, and they may receive an Underdog Bonus as detailed in the mission they are playing.

2. DETERMINE MISSION

Players determine which mission will be used for the battle; they can choose from the Boarding Action missions in this book, or those found in any other publications. This will determine the deployment map that players use, as well as the specific mission briefing. Players can either simply agree which they will use with their opponent, or they can roll a D33 to randomly select a mission using the table below. To roll a D33, roll two D3s one after the other; the first dice result determines the 'tens' and the second determines the 'units'. For example, if the first result is a 2 and the second is a 1, then the D33 result is a 21.

BOARDING ACTION MISSIONS

D33	MISSION
11	**Access Junction Primus** (pg 70)
12	**Deck Sweepers** (pg 72)
13	**The Pipeline** (pg 74)
21	**Power Struggle** (pg 76)
22	**Death in the Dark** (pg 78)
23	**Hull Breach** (pg 80)
31	**Control Centre** (pg 82)
32	**The Furnace** (pg 84)
33	**Rad Leak** (pg 86)

3. READ MISSION BRIEFING

Each mission has a mission briefing that will detail the aims of the battle. Each mission will also list one or more additional mission rules that will apply for the duration of the battle, and a series of primary objectives that award victory points to players. Players should read and familiarise themselves with these before proceeding.

4. CREATE THE BATTLEFIELD AND PLACE OBJECTIVE MARKERS

Players now create the battlefield and set up terrain features. Missions are played on Boarding Action battlefields and the position of all terrain features – Walls and Hatchways – and objective markers that must be placed on the battlefield will be shown on the deployment map of the mission players are playing. Each mission will also specify which Hatchways start the mission open and which start the mission closed.

5. FORM BOARDING SQUADS

Each unit in a player's Boarding Patrol that has a Starting Strength of 10 must now be split into two units, each containing 5 models. When splitting a unit, players should make a note of which models form each of the two new units. From this point onwards, these split units count as independent units for all rules purposes.

6. DETERMINE ATTACKER AND DEFENDER

Players roll off and the winner decides who will be the Attacker and who will be the Defender. The Attacker's and Defender's Entry Zones are labelled on the deployment map.

7. GENERATE STARTING COMMAND POINTS

Each player starts with 1 Command point.

8. DEPLOY ARMIES

Players alternate setting up their units one at a time, starting with the Defender. For each of a player's Entry Zones (as shown in the mission map), that player sets up one unit within that Entry Zone.

If a unit has a pre-battle rule that allows it to be set up anywhere on the battlefield, that unit is instead set up wholly within 6" of its Entry Zone. That Entry Zone is then considered to have had a unit set up within it, and cannot have another unit set up within it before the start of the battle. If one player finishes deploying all their units, their opponent then deploys the remainder of their units, until either both players have set up one unit per Entry Zone, or all units have been deployed.

If both players have units with abilities that allow them to be set up after both armies have deployed, players must roll off after all other units have been set up and alternate setting up these units, starting with the winner.

9. DETERMINE RESERVES

Any units in a player's army that do not start the battle on the battlefield, will start the battle in Strategic Reserves. This does not cost any Command points to do so.

In the Reinforcements step of a player's Movement phase (starting from the first battle round onwards), that player can select one of their Strategic Reserves units for each of their Entry Zones that has no models within it and set those units up within those Entry Zones.

If one or more of a player's Strategic Reserves units has a rule that would allow it to be set up in a location other than the battlefield (e.g. Teleport Strike) then in each of that player's turns (starting from the second battle round onwards), one of those units can be set up on the battlefield as described by their rule that turn, instead of being set up within an Entry Zone. Any Strategic Reserves units that have not arrived on the battlefield by the end of the fourth battle round count as having been destroyed (this does not apply to units that are placed into Strategic Reserves, after the first battle round has started).

ENTRY ZONES

In Boarding Actions, each player will have one or more deployment zones called Entry Zones. Each time a unit from your Boarding Patrol is set up, it must be set up wholly within one of your Entry Zones. If a unit will not fit wholly within an Entry Zone, all of its models must be set up as close to the centre of that Entry Zone as possible.

You cannot set up a unit within an Entry Zone if any other unit is in that Entry Zone. However, when setting up a unit at the start of the battle, you can set up your **WARLORD** alongside that unit as if it was a part of it, using the same Entry Zone. Rules that prevent a unit from being set up within a specific distance of another model or unit cannot prevent a unit from being set up within an Entry Zone.

10. DETERMINE FIRST TURN

Players roll off and the winner takes the first turn.

11. RESOLVE PRE-BATTLE ABILITIES

Each player can resolve a single pre-battle ability that units in their army may have, irrespective of how many units in their army may have them, starting with the player who will take the first turn.

12. BEGIN THE BATTLE

The first battle round begins. Players continue to resolve battle rounds until the battle ends.

13. ENDING THE BATTLE

The battle ends after five battle rounds have been completed. If one player has no models remaining in their army at the start of their turn, the other player may continue to play out their turns until the battle ends.

14. DETERMINE VICTOR

At the end of the battle, the player with the most victory points is the winner. If players are tied, the battle is a draw.

Each player can score a maximum of 90 victory points from mission objectives (any excess victory points awarded are discounted). If every model in a player's army was painted to a Battle Ready standard, that player is awarded a bonus 10 victory points. This gives players a maximum total score out of 100 victory points.

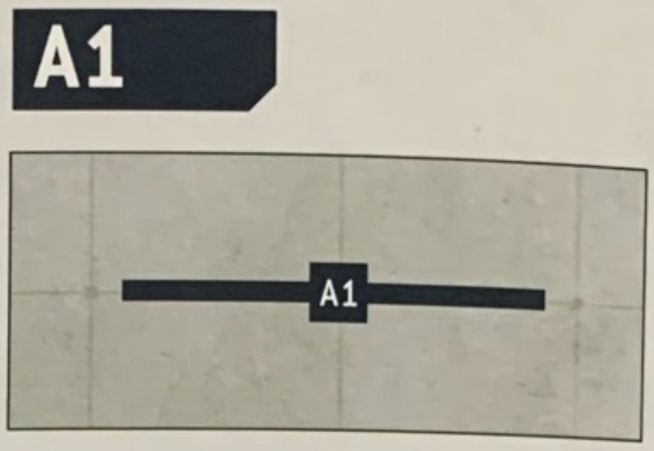
MISSION OBJECTIVES

During the battle, players can earn victory points by achieving mission objectives. There are two types of mission objectives: End Game and Progressive. Progressive mission objectives are scored during the battle (exactly when is detailed on the objective itself), and can be achieved, and hence award victory points, several times. End Game mission objectives are scored at the end of the battle.

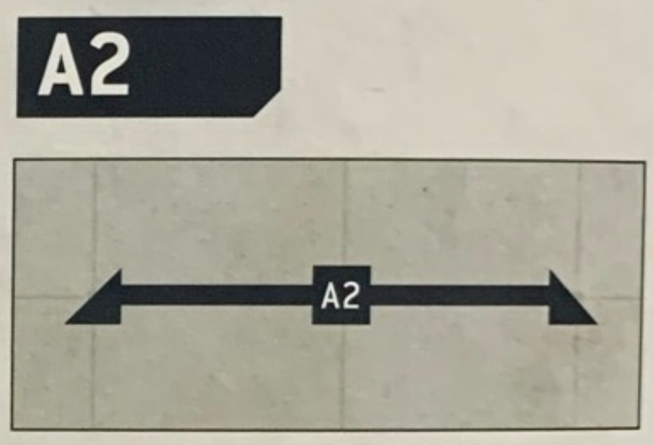
COMPONENTS

LONG WALLS

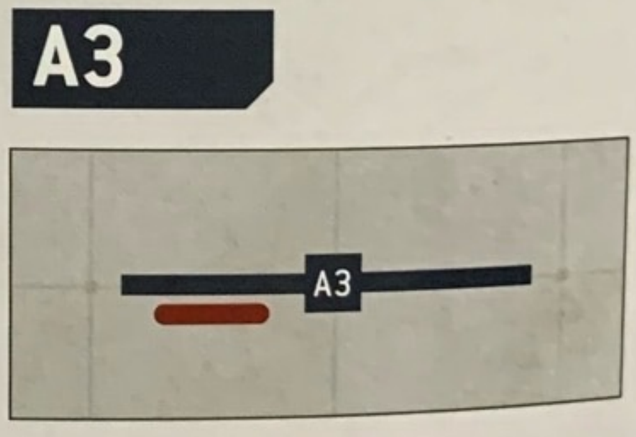
LONG WALL



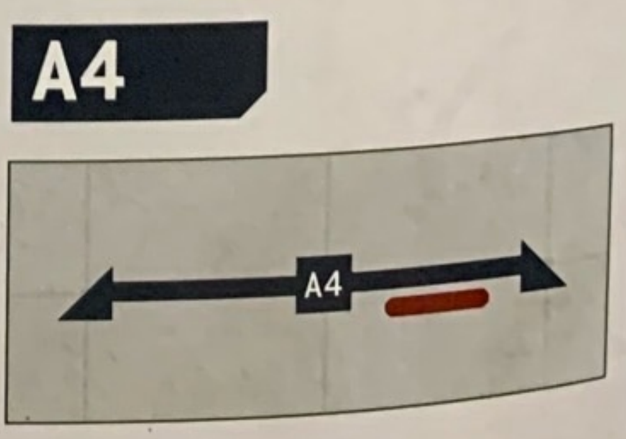
LONG WALL WITH PILLARS



LONG WALL WITH HATCHWAY

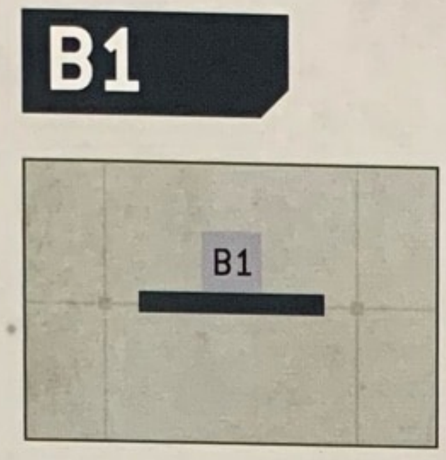


LONG WALL WITH HATCHWAY AND PILLARS

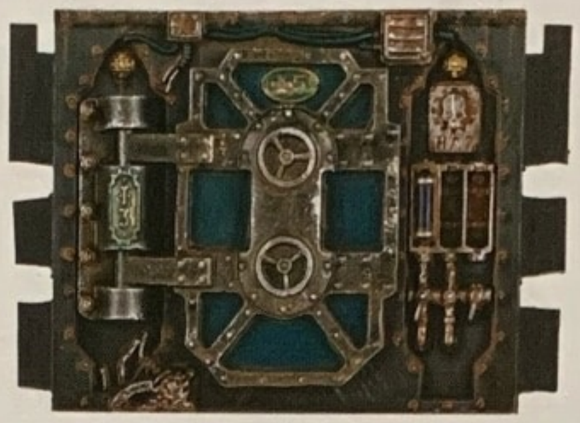


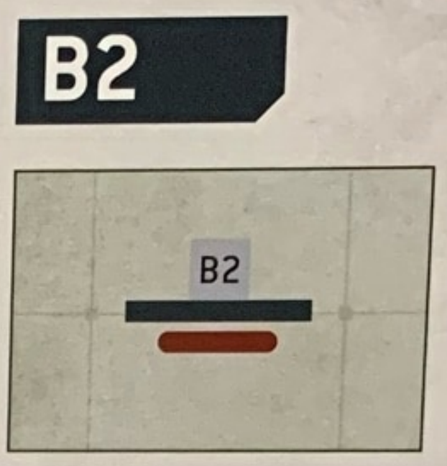
SHORT WALLS

SHORT WALL



SHORT WALL WITH HATCHWAY

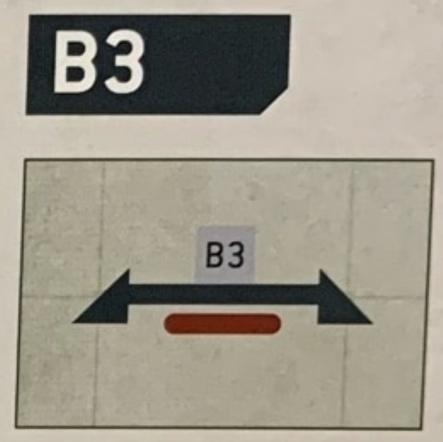




SHORT WALL WITH HATCHWAY AND PILLARS

Type 1

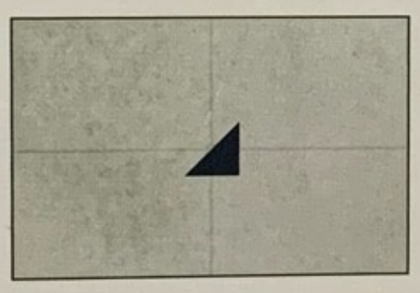
Type 2



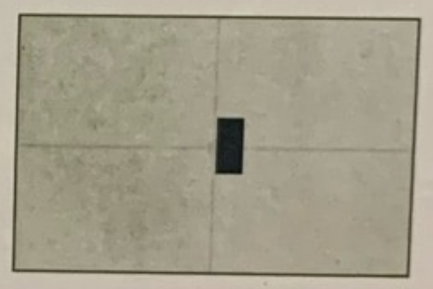
PILLAR

Left Pillar

Right Pillar

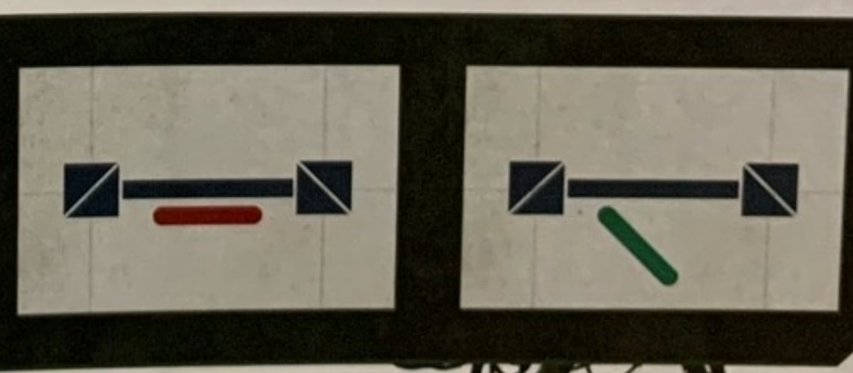


WALL END



HATCHWAY POSITIONS

The locations of the Hatchways on the mission map are specified by the symbols to the right. This will help you identify the orientation of Walls with Hatchways.



BOARDING ACTION MISSION

ACCESS JUNCTION PRIMUS

MISSION BRIEFING

As they battle through the blazing decks of the contested vessel, two opposing forces approach one another from either end of an arterial access corridor. Whoever can press forward and drive their enemies back will have the opportunity to secure this crucial transit route. From here, they can access vital systems and adjoining decks throughout the ship, and likely seize the entire vessel. The knowledge that both sides are battling for so vital a strategic prize only makes the fight all the more savage.

MISSION RULES

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

CAPTURE THE JUNCTION

Progressive Objective

This pivotal intersection must be seized and then held until relief forces arrive to secure it against all comers. Even should you be forced to pile the bodies of your own slain to form barricades against the foe, the junction cannot be allowed to fall into enemy hands lest the entire ship follow.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

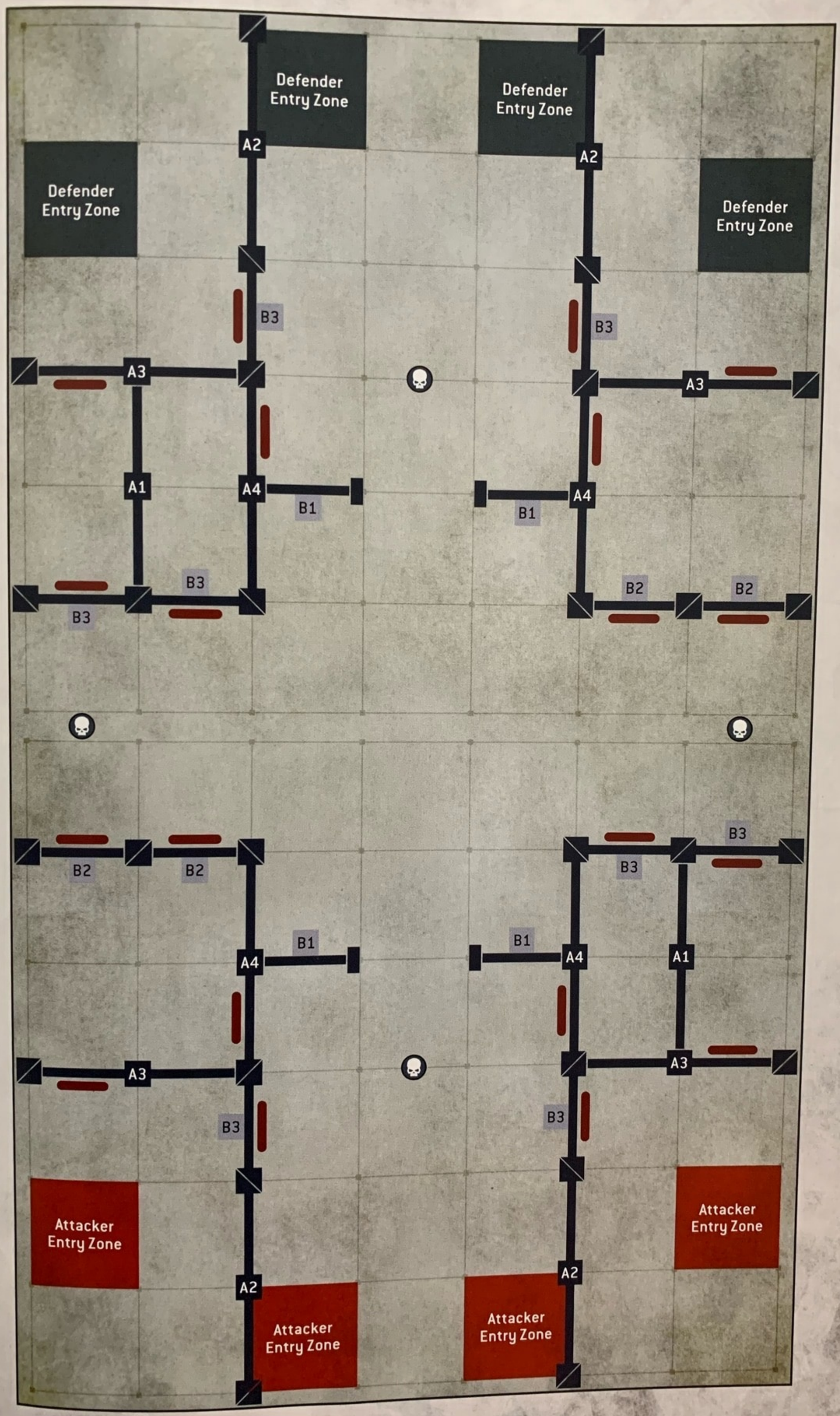
PURGE THE SHIP

End Game Objective

So crucial is this confluence of access corridors that both sides are willing to hurl overwhelming forces in to seize it. Should one side succeed in butchering the enemy's forces while preserving their own, they will then be in a position to capitalise on their conquest and sweep the vessel clear of foes.

At the end of the battle, each player totals the points value of their opponent's units that have been destroyed (note that if a unit was split when forming Boarding Squads and only one of those subsequently split units was destroyed, then only the points cost of the models that were in the one that was destroyed are added to the total) and scores 15 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 45 victory points):

- If the total is 125 points or more.
- If the total is 250 points or more.
- If the total is 375 points or more.


Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
A2
A2
B3
B3
A3
A3
A1
A4
B1
B1
B3
B3
B2
B2
B2
B2
A4
A4
B1
B1
A3
A1
B3
B3
B3
A2
A2
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone

BOARDING ACTION MISSION

DECK SWEEPERS

MISSION BRIEFING

Many are the derelict vessels adrift in the void. Some are discovered lost upon deserted space lanes and preyed upon for salvage. Others tumble through the midst of raging void battles, having but recently been depopulated and crippled by incoming fire. Whatever their nature, such void ships often become battlegrounds as rival forces sweep them deck by deck, seeking to purge their enemies and claim the bounty of technology and resources the derelict contains.

MISSION RULES

Underdog Bonus: Before the battle, in the Deploy Armies step, if a player receives an Underdog Bonus, they can use the Underdog Entry Zone in addition to the other Entry Zones marked on the mission map when setting up their units. Once the first battle round has started, the Underdog Entry Zone cannot be used when that player sets up any Strategic Reserve units from their army in an Entry Zone.

OBJECTIVES

TAKE AND HOLD

Progressive Objective

It is not enough to engage the enemy as you encounter them aboard the derelict. Your purge of their forces must be structured and thorough, seizing each strategic waypoint in turn and ensuring no foe slips through the gaps lest they endanger your salvage and recovery operations, or outflank your forces.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 10 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy.

SWEEP THE DECKS

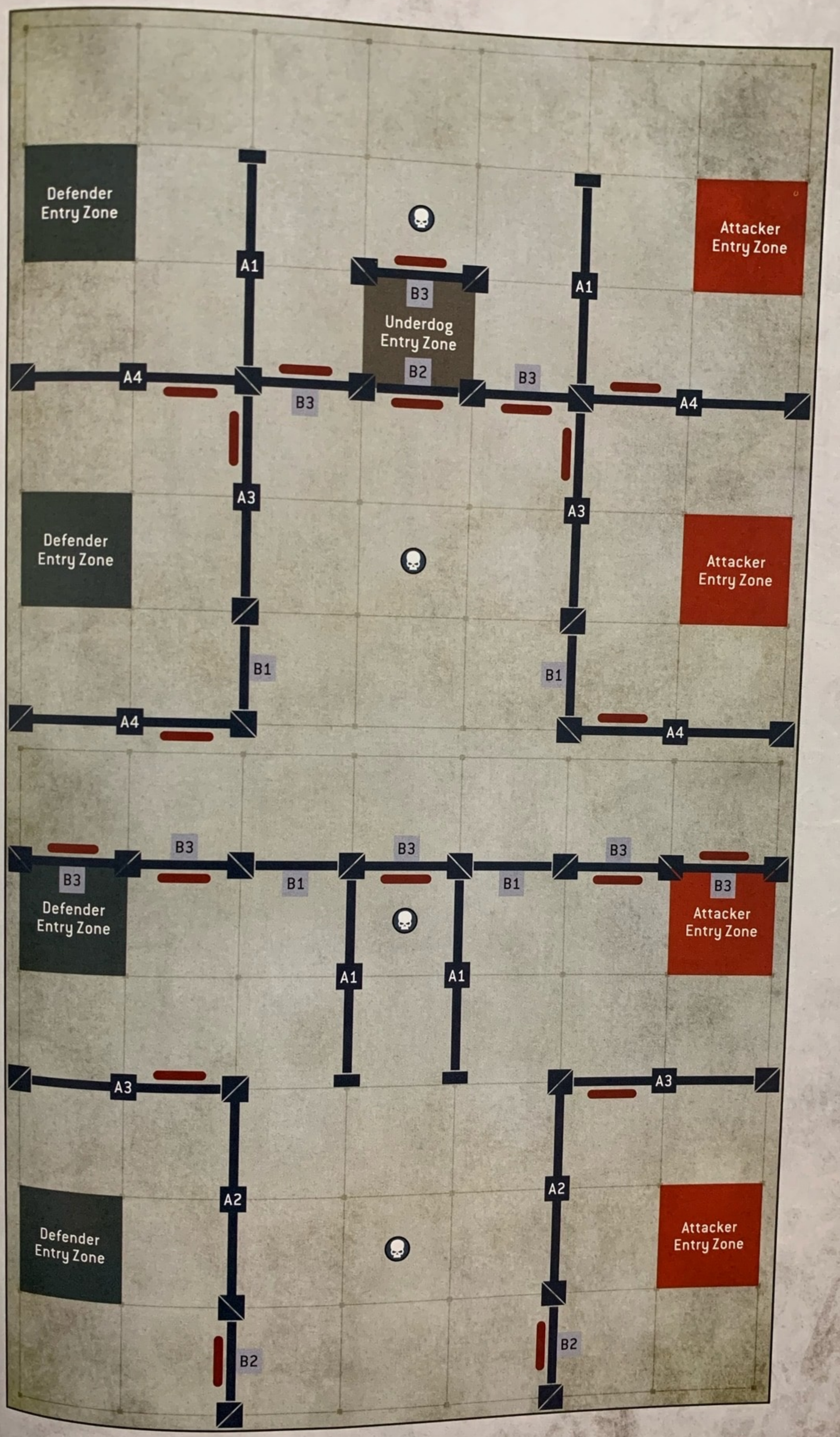
End Game Objective

Deep void salvage operations are hazardous affairs, recovery adepts braving zero-gravity infernos, supernatural terrors and sudden depressurisation as they work. Purge any hostile forces from this area, to allow your salvagers to proceed without the additional danger of incoming enemy fire.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 15 victory points for each objective marker they control.

'It's simple. That derelict has enough kerozium and ignite in her holds to keep my ship's oxy-recyc running for a hundred spans. You only want her because you think that just because you built a thing it belongs to your made-up God-Emperor. We're going aboard. We're taking what we need, and if you try to stop us I'll gladly pay the price in our ammunition and your blood. Run away or pull the trigger, your choice Human.'

- Kâhl Dorgväe Ymykh, warning to Shipmaster Nastria before the bloodbath aboard the Divine Light


Defender Entry Zone
A1
B3
Underdog Entry Zone
B2
A1
Attacker Entry Zone
A4
B3
B3
A4
A3
Defender Entry Zone
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
B1
B1
A4
A4
B3
B3
B3
B3
B1
B1
B3
Defender Entry Zone
B3
Attacker Entry Zone
A1
A1
A3
A3
A2
A2
Defender Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
B2
B2

BOARDING ACTION MISSION
THE PIPELINE

MISSION BRIEFING

Few technologies are more complex or finely balanced than a void ship. Life support; motive systems; lights; gravity; shields; weapons; communications; these and countless other systems must work in harmony for the vessel to function properly. Many boarding actions become focused around the control and regulation – or indeed severing – of the pipes and conduits through which such vital systems or the power or fuel for them flows. This is one such battle for the very lifeblood of a ship.

MISSION RULES

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

REGULATE THE FLOW

Progressive Objective

By securing both the primary control shrine and secondary regulator station for a specific conduit, fuel pipe or the like, your forces can either ensure that the flow stays uninterrupted or choke it off entirely. Such control is vital to victory in this battle, whether you seek to keep your vessel operational or cripple the craft and leave it wide open to attack.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 25 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.
- They control both objective markers labelled A.
- They control both objective markers labelled B.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy.

'Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Let flow the blessed blood of the machine.

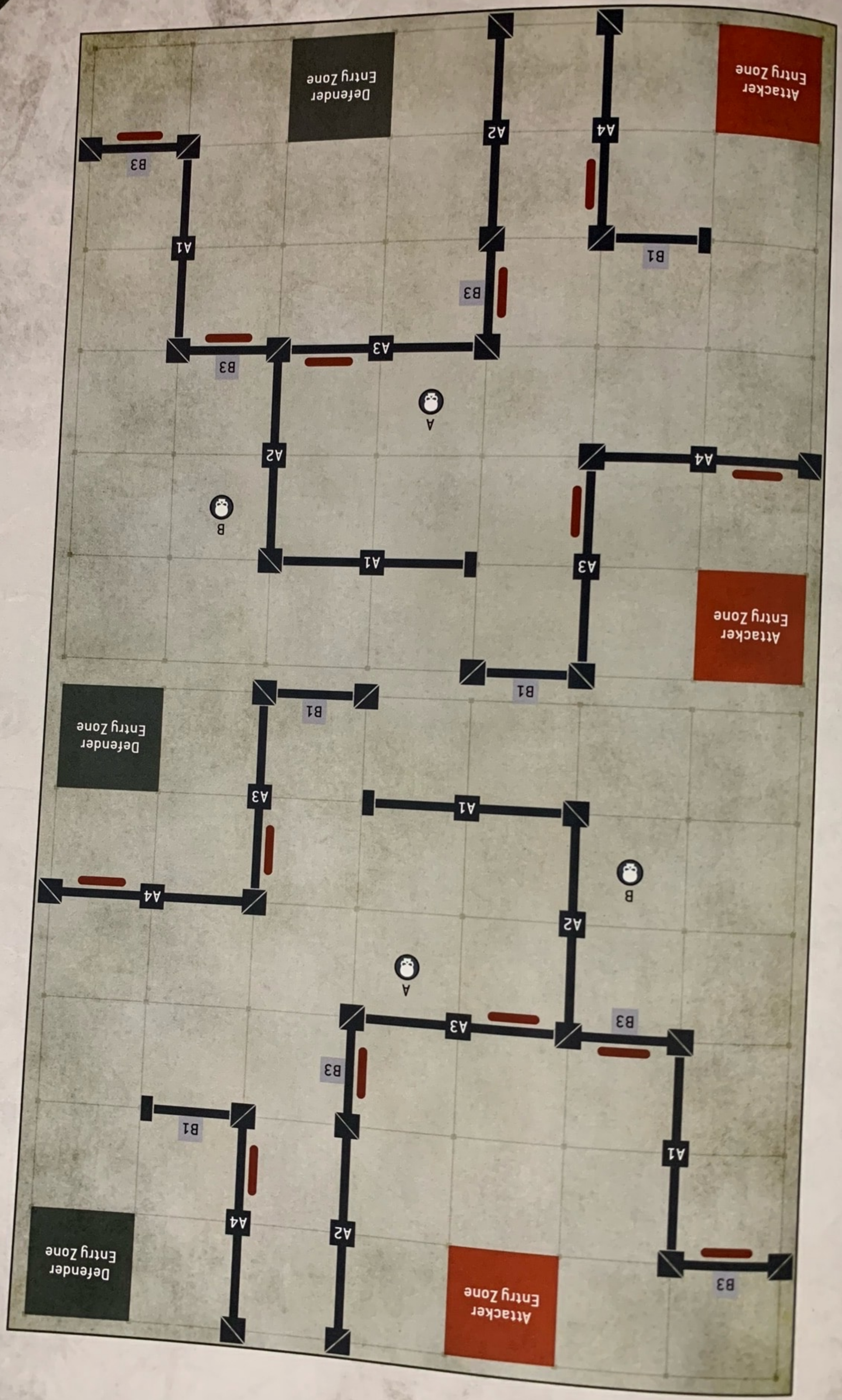
Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Holy are the wires along which dances the motive force.

Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, May the oxygen vents bring breath to unworthy lungs.

Omnis Omissus Omnissiah absolutis regnum rex, Forth plasma! Forth aqua! Forth linguis binharicus!

See divine void vessel soar!'

- Excerpt, Ninety-ninth rite of void ship unberthing


Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
A4
A2
B1
B3
A1
Attacker Entry Zone
A4
A2
A
B
A1
B3
Defender Entry Zone
B1
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
A3
B1
B
A
B3
A1
Defender Entry Zone
A4
B1
A2
Attacker Entry Zone
B3
A1

BOARDING ACTION MISSION

POWER STRUGGLE

MISSION BRIEFING

By capturing successive power nodes, linked generatorum shrines, plasma relay conduits or the like, it is possible for a cunning commander to gain mastery of a vessel's motive force. They can either reawaken those systems they require functional that the enemy may have sabotaged, or plunge their foes into airless and freezing darkness. Dynamic leaders often command such pinpoint strikes themselves, overseeing what may well prove the killing blow in the entire deck-to-deck war.

MISSION RULES

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

POWER NETWORK

Progressive Objective

Gaining control of one node in the localised power network is a victory in itself, but the more sequential systems that can be captured, the more widespread becomes the flow of power you command. You must seize as much of the network as you are able to and then hold it against the foe in order to guarantee victory.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.
- They control two or more objective markers that are directly linked by the Power Lines (see below).

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points).

Objective markers connected by these lines are linked (see deployment map opposite). If two objective markers are connected directly by these lines, without any other objective markers in between them, they are said to be directly linked by the Power Lines.

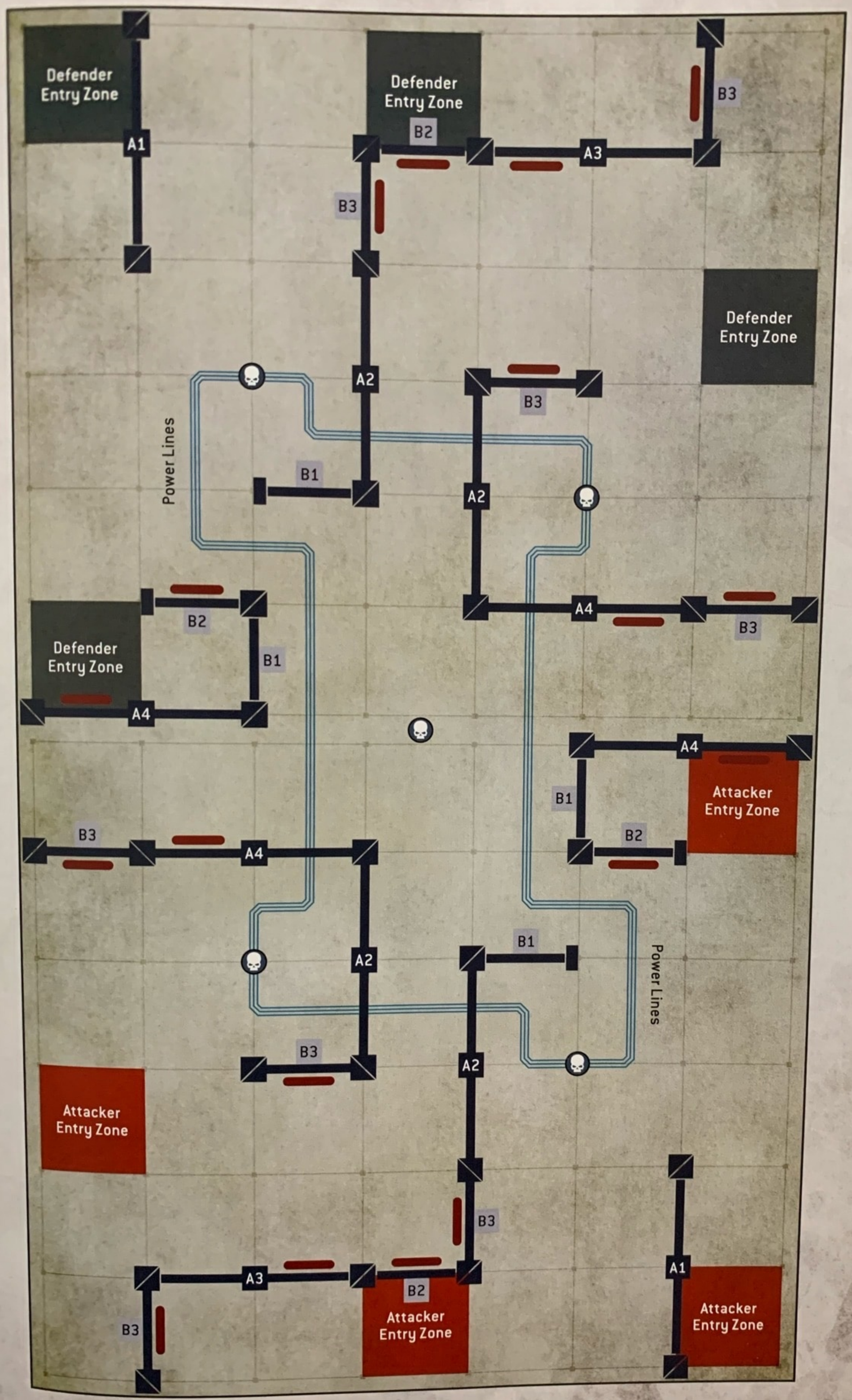
Power Lines

CUT OFF THE HEAD

End Game Objective

You have the opportunity not only to sever the enemy's grasp upon the power flowing through the vessel, but to also sunder their command and control network by slaying their leader. This may be enough to prevent your foe capitalising on what might otherwise be a victory, or to utterly compound their defeat.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 10 victory points if the enemy's **WARLORD** has been destroyed.


Defender Entry Zone
A1
Defender Entry Zone
B2
B3
A3
B3
Defender Entry Zone
A2
B3
Power Lines
B1
A2
B2
Defender Entry Zone
B1
A4
A4
B3
A4
B1
Attacker Entry Zone
B2
B3
A4
A2
B1
Power Lines
B3
A2
Attacker Entry Zone
B3
A3
B2
Attacker Entry Zone
A1
Attacker Entry Zone

BOARDING ACTION MISSION

DEATH IN THE DARK

MISSION BRIEFING

Amidst the savage mayhem of a shipboard battle, power fluctuations and sudden, violent malfunctions are common. Whether due to enemy fire hammering from outside, acts of sabotage by boarders and desperate defenders, or even supernatural or sorcerous energies being unleashed, entire decks are plunged suddenly into darkness. Pipes rupture, spewing scalding steam or blinding plasma, or else choking smoke fills entire corridors quicker than purifier shrines can draw it away. In such conditions, the fighting becomes more desperate than ever.

MISSION RULES

Lights Out: At the end of each player's Movement phase, roll one D6 for each Lighting Area: on a 1-3, until the end of the turn, the lights in that area turn off.

When selecting a target for a ranged attack, if the attacking unit or the target are wholly within a Lighting Area that has the lights off:

- If the target is more than 9" away, that attack cannot be made.
- If the target is within 9", subtract 1 from that attack's hit roll.

When selecting the targets of a charge, if the charging unit or the potential target are wholly within a Lighting Area that has the lights off:

- If the potential target is more than 9" away, that unit cannot be a target of that charge.
- If the potential target is within 9", subtract 1 from the charge roll (to a maximum of -1, regardless of how many units are in Lighting Areas with the lights off).

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

LOCK IT DOWN!

Progressive Objective

When a deck is plunged into darkness or suffers atmospheric or supernatural taint, leaving the situation unchecked can lead to panic or spiralling mayhem. The best solution is to seize decisive control of the entire zone before enacting whatever rituals or protocols are required to restore functionality and calm.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points).

SEEK SANCTUARY

End Game Objective

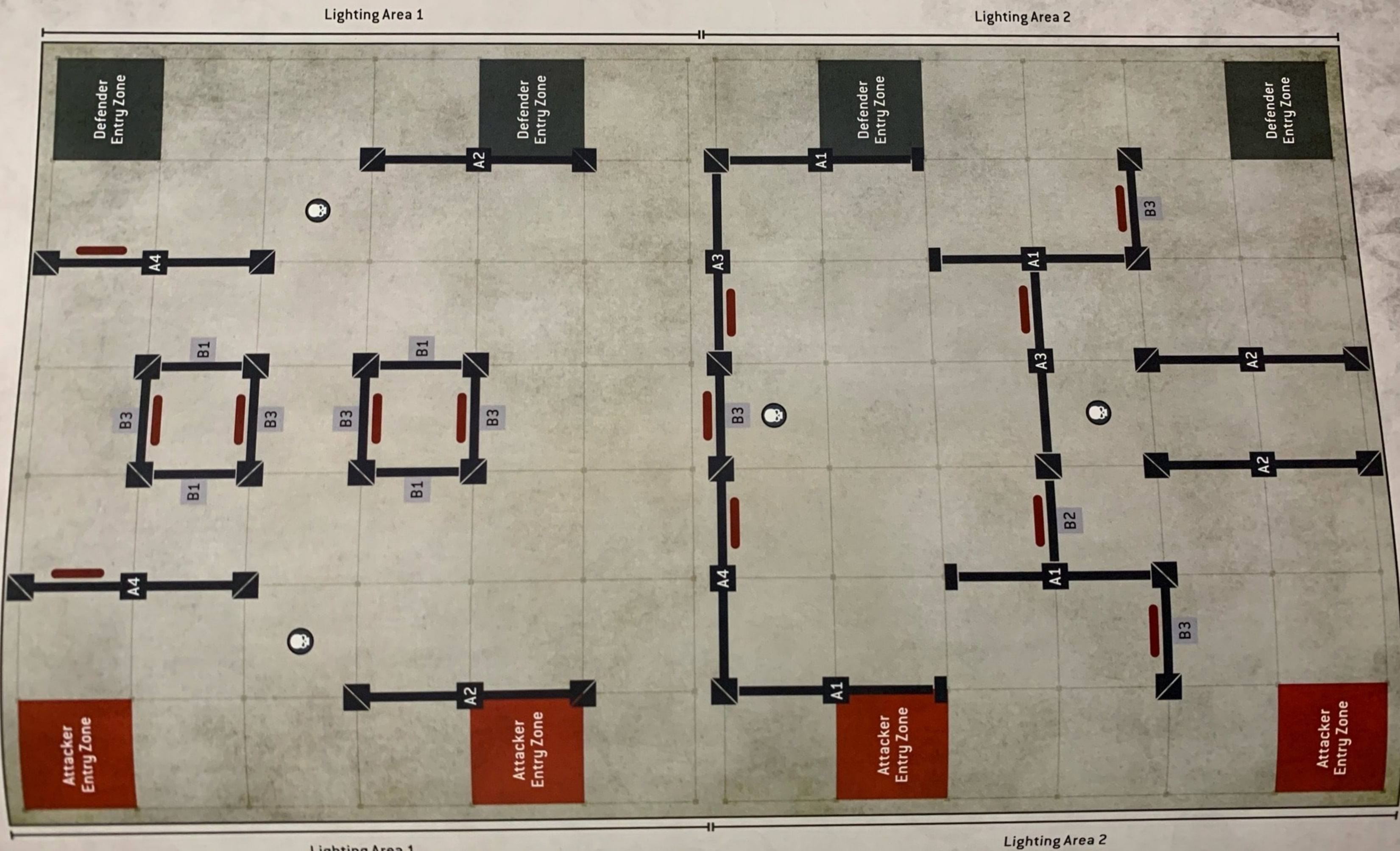
Should it prove impossible to fully secure such a compromised area of the ship, it is wise to withdraw to a defensible zone and dig in. Either reinforcements will arrive to allow another forward push, or whatever dangerous fluctuations are occurring will – hopefully – die down.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 15 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 30 victory points):

- They control both objective markers in Lighting Area 1.
- They control both objective markers in Lighting Area 2.

'We blew the hatches, lobbed in a bandolier of Saint Shrapnel's blessings, then moved in and purged the last few xenos that still had the temerity to be breathing. Commissar Pholen ordered us to push on without waiting for Maelo's squad and so we did, lasguns up and sight-lines covered. Everything was going by the Primer until the lumen died and plunged us all into pitch darkness. It was when we realised that our lumen packs had died too that we knew something unnatural was happening. That was when we heard Sergeant Maelo's squad start screaming. After that, things got really nasty, really fast.'

- Vox-record, Sergeant Gdolvus Ranjite, 88th Skelorn Infantry


Lighting Area 1
Lighting Area 2
Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone
A1
A2
A3
A4
B1
B2
B3
Lighting Area 1
Lighting Area 2

BOARDING ACTION MISSION
HULL BREACH

MISSION BRIEFING

Hammered by enemy fire amidst a roiling void war; caught in the inexorable drag of a black hole; plummeting towards a fiery death in a planet's atmosphere; caught in the unholy coronae of a warp storm – whatever horrible fate is tearing this void ship apart, it threatens to take your warriors with it. Unfortunately, there is vital data contained in cogitator banks deep within the ship. While the enemy still threaten to seize that intelligence for themselves, evacuation is not an option.

MISSION RULES

Deadly Decompression: From the second battle round onwards, at the start of the battle round, the Attacker rolls one D6: on a 3+, until the end of the battle round, one of the Compartments is vented to the void by the space battle going on outside. If a Compartment is vented, roll one D6 to determine which one. Close all of the open Hatchways in that Compartment and each unit within it suffers D3 mortal wounds. While a Compartment is vented:

- When a unit within that Compartment is selected to make a Normal Move or Advance, until the end of the turn, subtract 1" from the Move characteristic of models in that unit.
- Each time an attack is allocated to a model in that Compartment, improve the Armour Penetration characteristic of that attack by 1.

The Datacores: In this mission, units from both players' armies can attempt the following action:

Download Data (Action): One unit from your army can start to perform this action at the end of your Movement phase if it is within range of an objective marker that you control that has not already had its data downloaded by your army (see below). The action is completed at the end of your next Command phase, provided the unit that was performing it is still within range of the same objective marker. If completed, your army is said to have downloaded the data from that objective marker.

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

DATA RETRIEVAL

Progressive Objective

Even should it cost the lives of every warrior you lead, the precious data held within the cogitator cores must be extracted and relayed back to your commanders. In such an age of ignorance, no prize can be more valuable than wisdom. At least, so they tell you...

Each time a unit from your army successfully completes the Download Data action (see left), score 15 victory points.

TEMPORARY STABILISATION

Progressive Objective

The ship might be disintegrating, but if you can secure key points through this deck it should be possible to lock down hatchways and reroute life support long enough to complete your mission. With luck, you might even hold an extraction route open so that some of your warriors can escape alive.

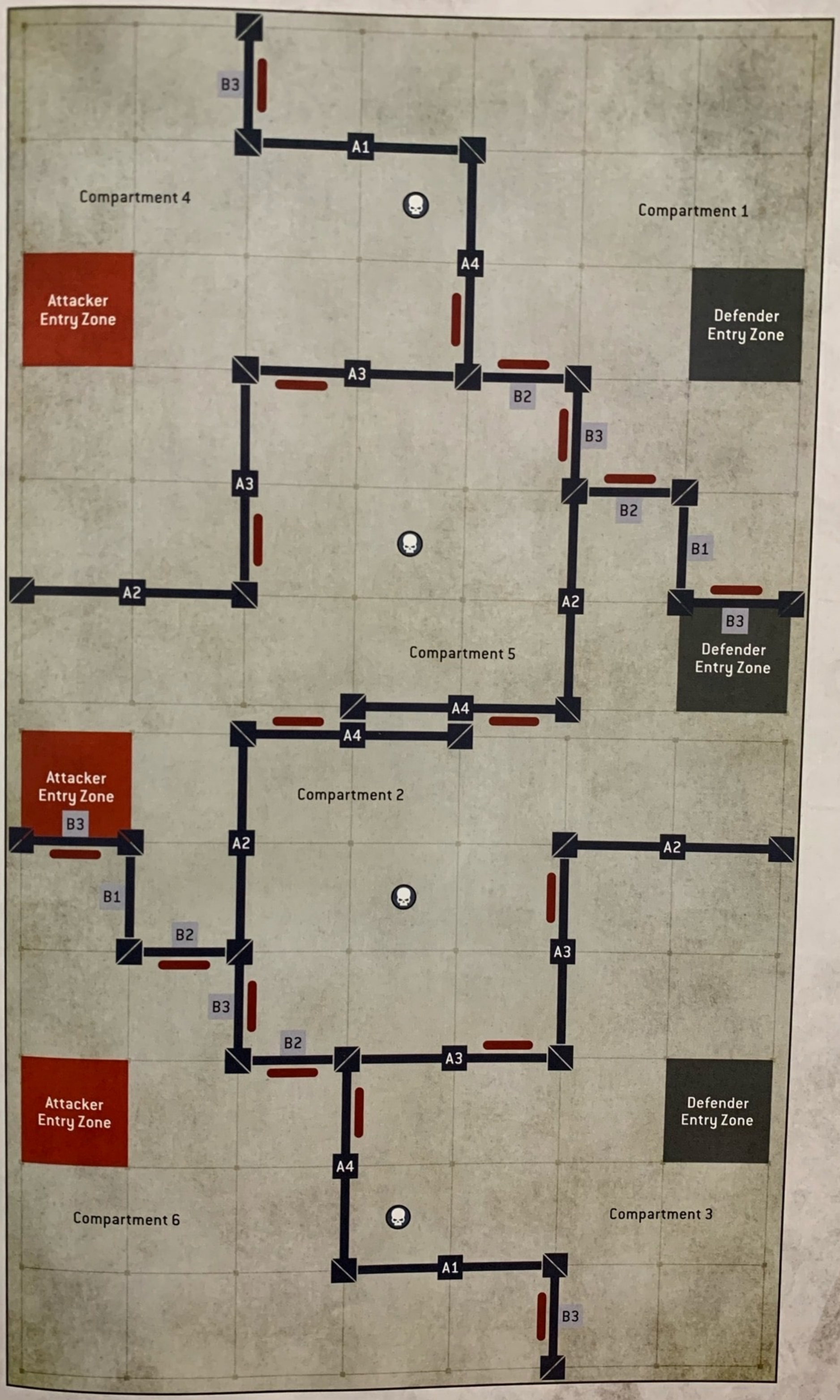
At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points).

'Interrogator Ulis, see that the Captain secures our STC data at any cost, understand? Once the transmission rituals are complete and retention is confirmed within our cogitator cores, blow the charges. I will suffer no witnesses to this acquisition. Enlightenment is wasted upon the unworthy.'

- Inquisitor Elrik Morrow


B3
A1
Compartment 4
Compartment 1
A4
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
A3
B2
B3
A3
B2
B1
A2
A2
B3
Defender Entry Zone
Compartment 5
A4
A4
Attacker Entry Zone
B3
Compartment 2
A2
A2
B1
B2
A3
B3
B2
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
A4
Compartment 6
Compartment 3
A1
B3

BOARDING ACTION MISSION
CONTROL CENTRE

MISSION BRIEFING

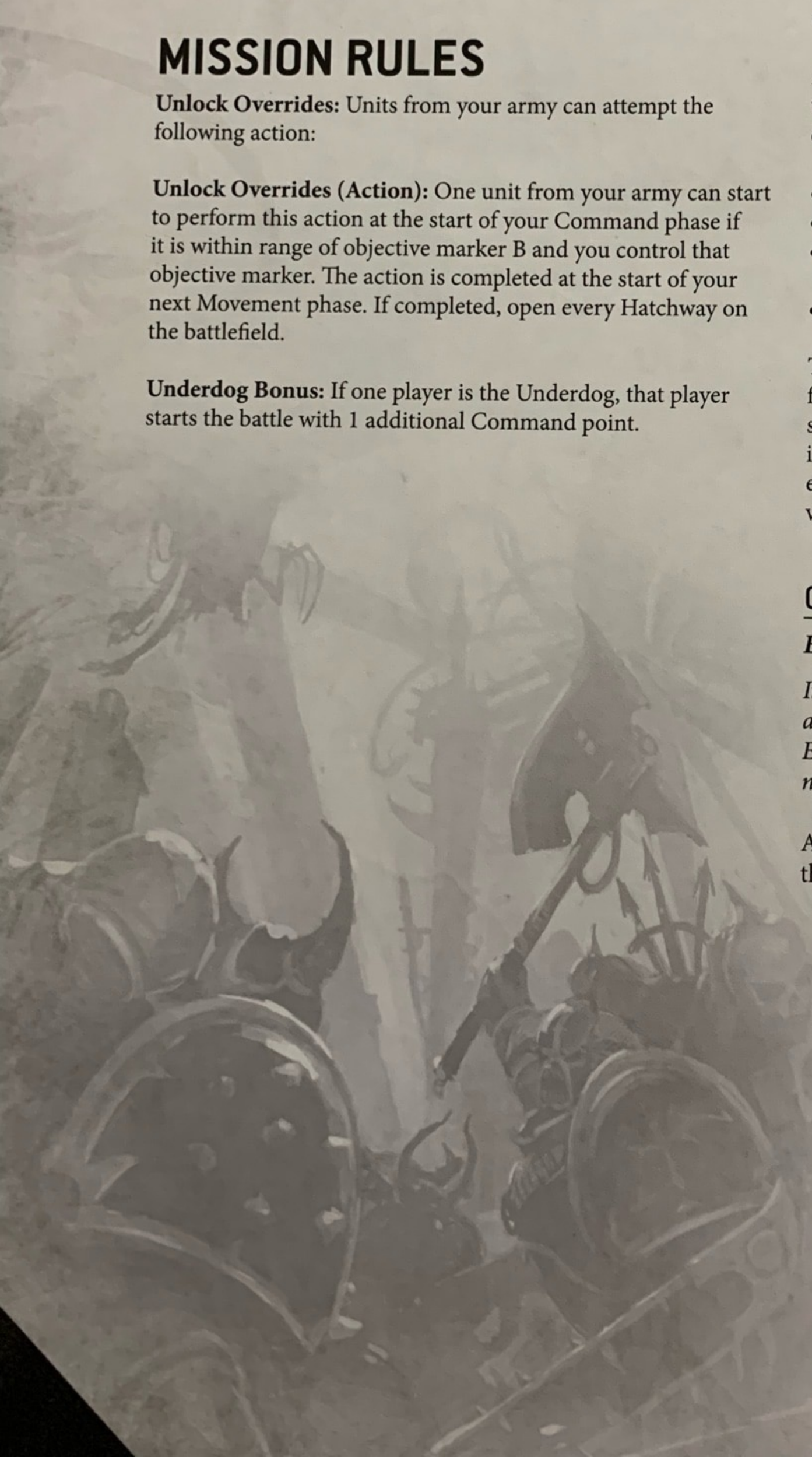
The bridge and the enginarium rank amongst the most vital locations on any void ship. They are far from the only strategic targets sought by boarding parties, however. Fierce battles may rage over relay shrines, ammunition magazines, cogitator centres, warp core access sanctums and many other sites. Direct assaults against dug-in defenders are perilous in such conflicts, but in the tangled multi-deck environs of a void ship there are usually alternative routes to victory for a suitably cunning commander.

MISSION RULES

Unlock Overrides: Units from your army can attempt the following action:

Unlock Overrides (Action): One unit from your army can start to perform this action at the start of your Command phase if it is within range of objective marker B and you control that objective marker. The action is completed at the start of your next Movement phase. If completed, open every Hatchway on the battlefield.

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.



OBJECTIVES

SECURE AT ALL COSTS

Progressive Objective

Whatever your objective, it is imperative that it be seized swiftly. However, if you are wise you will seek also to secure the key access ways and secondary relay stations that can be reached without risking a direct offensive. Whoever is able to seize control of the wider strategic battle on this deck will doubtless capture the critical objective in the end.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.
- They control objective marker A.

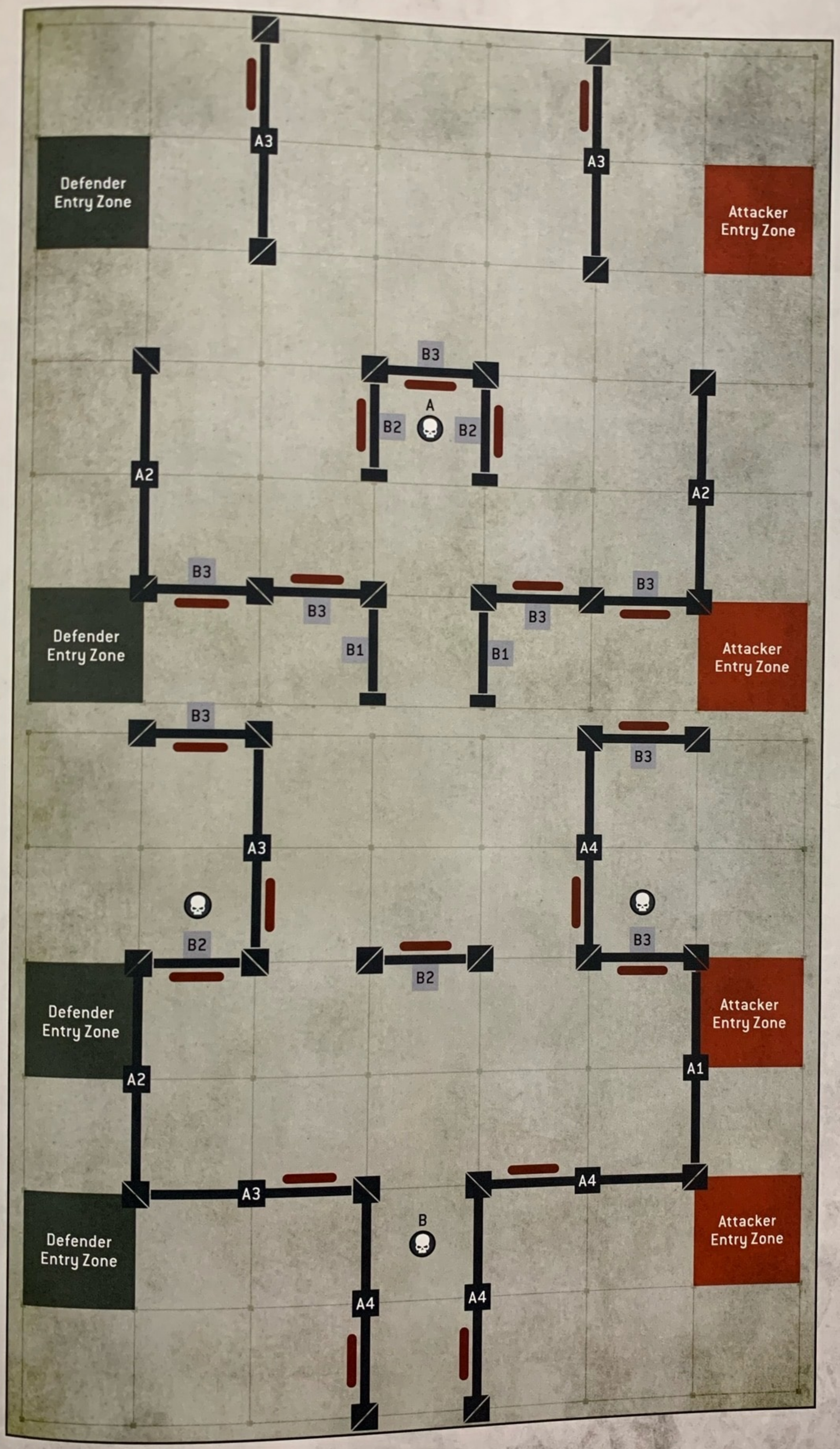
This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points).

CUT OFF THE HEAD

End Game Objective

It is common to find vital leadership personnel either overseeing a strategic target of such value, or leading the assault against it. Ensuring that the enemy commander does not survive this battle, no matter its wider strategic outcome, is a victory in its own right.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 10 victory points if their opponent's **WARLORD** has been destroyed.


Defender Entry Zone
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
B3
A
B2
B2
A2
B3
B3
B1
Defender Entry Zone
B3
B3
A2
B1
Attacker Entry Zone
B3
A3
B3
A4
B2
B2
Defender Entry Zone
B3
A2
A1
Attacker Entry Zone
A3
A4
B
A4
Defender Entry Zone
Attacker Entry Zone

BOARDING ACTION MISSION
THE FURNACE

MISSION BRIEFING

A vital target has been located within an area converted into a deadly blast furnace. Perhaps the enemy are attempting to cleanse what they deem to be a heretical artefact or witch slated for ritual execution. Maybe this area has been booby-trapped against boarders, or a vital dataslate may have simply been dropped by an officer already slain within the furnace's grisly confines. Whatever the case, victory will go to those with the nerve to brave the flames, and the fortitude to endure them.

In this mission, the Zones marked in this manner on the deployment map comprise the Furnace, and any units within them are said to be within the Furnace.

MISSION RULES

Rites of Incineration: Units from your army can attempt the following action:

Turn on the Burners (Action): One unit from your army can start to perform this action at the end of your Movement phase if it is within a Furnace Control Zone (see opposite). The action is completed at the end of the turn. If completed, for each unit within the Furnace (see opposite), roll one D6 for each model in that unit: for each 4+, that unit suffers 1 mortal wound (to a maximum of 3 mortal wounds per unit).

Worth Dying For: Any unit can attempt the Secure Site action (pg 61) on an objective marker within the Furnace, regardless of whether it has the Objective Secured ability or not.

Desperate Measures: In your Command phase, if you control one or more objective markers within the Furnace, roll one D6: on a 5+, you gain 1 Command point.

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

PROMETHIUM EXCHANGERS

Progressive Objective

Crucial promethium exchanger shrines are found within this deck. Through them runs the fuel supply required to keep the furnace flames burning. Though it may well be too late to help warriors already battling amidst the hungry flames, securing the exchangers will allow you to either feed the fury of the furnace or starve it into submission by battle's end.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.
- They control one or more objective markers in the Furnace.

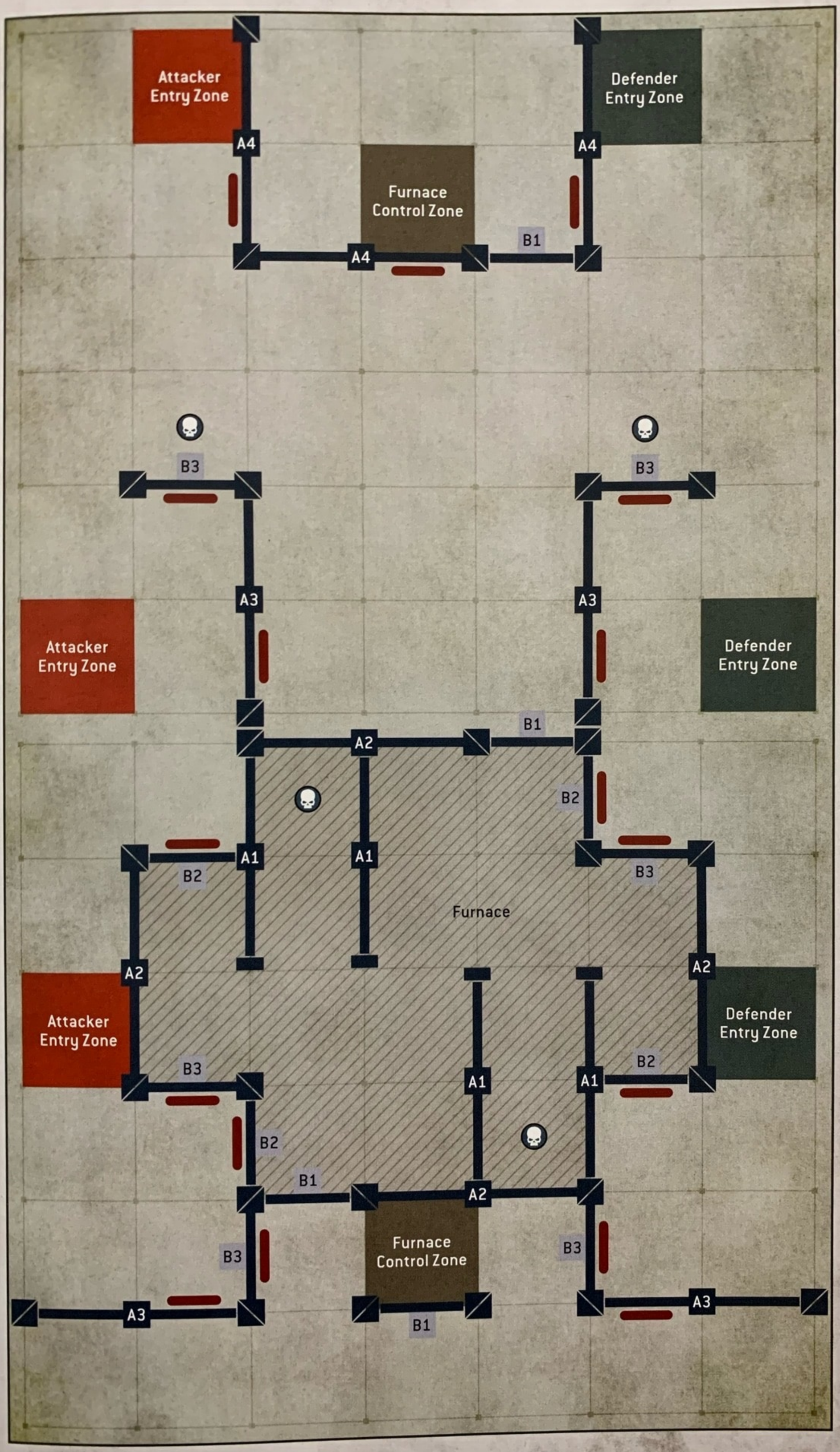
This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 20 victory points).

COSTLY PRIZE

End Game Objective

Only by your swift actions, and by those of your warriors, can whatever was consigned to the furnace be secured. Whether you choose to save it from the flames or see it all turned to ashes, of course, is up to you.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 10 victory points if they control one or more objective markers within the Furnace.


Attacker Entry Zone
A4
Furnace Control Zone
B1
Defender Entry Zone
A4
A4
B3
B3
A3
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
B1
A2
B2
B2
A1
A1
B3
Furnace
A2
A2
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
B3
A1
A1
B2
B2
B1
A2
B3
Furnace Control Zone
B3
A3
A3
B1

BOARDING ACTION MISSION

RAD LEAK

MISSION BRIEFING

Amidst the running gunfights and shrapnel-filled explosions of a boarding action, it is inevitable that vital – often hazardous – systems will be damaged. As the fighting spills into this vessel's enginarium, it is one of the crucial plasma reactors that has been hit. Exotic and deadly spectra of radiation now swirl through the air like malicious spirits and seek to drain the life from the warring combatants. Securing victory has now become a cruel and deadly race against time.

MISSION RULES

Rad Exposure: As the battle progresses the radiation fallout from the reactor will spread further across the battlefield and its intensity will grow as it does so. The battlefield is divided up into four Sectors, A through D. Starting with Sector A in battle round 1, the radiation will begin to contaminate the battlefield.

There are three levels of radiation exposure – Mild, High and Extreme – each more severe than the last. At the start of the battle round, depending on which Sectors a unit finds itself within and which battle round it is, that unit will be exposed to different effects (as shown in the table below) until the end of that battle round. If a unit starts the battle round within multiple Sectors, then it suffers from whichever Sector has the most extreme level of radiation.

BATTLE ROUND RAD LEVELS

BATTLEFIELD SECTOR	RAD LEVEL EXPERIENCED		
	MILD	HIGH	EXTREME
A	1	2	3+
B	2	3	4+
C	3	4	5
D	4	5	-

The effects of each of these levels are:

- **Mild Rad:** Subtract 1 from the Leadership characteristic of models in this unit.
- **High Rad:** Subtract 1" from the Move characteristic of models in this unit. This unit also suffers from the effect of Mild Rad.
- **Extreme Rad:** Subtract 1 from the Toughness characteristic of models in this unit. This unit also suffers from the effect of High Rad and Mild Rad.

Underdog Bonus: If one player is the Underdog, that player starts the battle with 1 additional Command point.

OBJECTIVES

URGENT TAKEOVER

Progressive Objective

The increasingly inimical conditions on this deck do not change the fact that, without securing vital systems and assets within the enginarium, victory is at risk throughout the entire ship. It is therefore imperative that you drive the enemy back with the utmost urgency and seize all your objectives before conditions become unendurable for your warriors.

At the end of each player's Command phase, the player whose turn it is scores 5 victory points for each of the following conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points):

- They control one or more objective markers.
- They control two or more objective markers.
- They control more objective markers than their opponent controls.

This objective cannot be scored in the first battle round. In the fifth battle round, the player who has the second turn does not score any victory points at the end of their Command phase; instead, at the end of their turn, they score 5 victory points for each of the above conditions they satisfy (for a maximum of 15 victory points).

SALVATION SHRINES

End Game Objective

The only way to prevent total rad-saturation of this enginarium lies in controlling its salvation shrines. These sacred machineries have the ability to reroute plasma flow through reserve generatora, to isolate the exposed cores and to render them quiescent while repairs are carried out and rad-scrubbers cycled. Of course, sabotaging these shrines would equally doom the enginarium altogether should that be your goal.

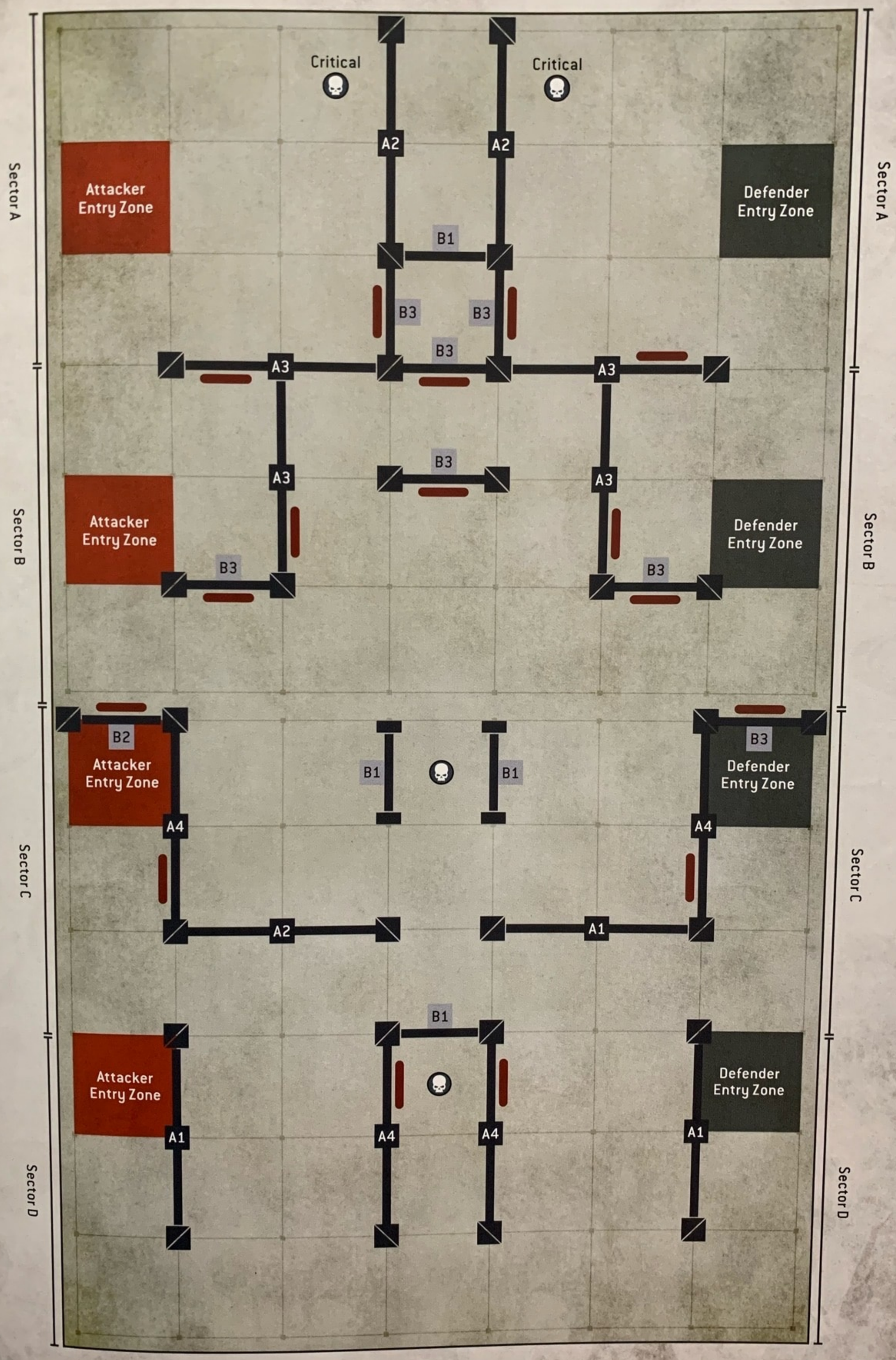
At the end of the battle, if one player controls both objective markers labelled Critical, they score 15 victory points.

CUT OFF THE HEAD

End Game Objective

Amidst the terror and mayhem of the rad leak, and the ferocious fight to secure the salvation shrines, the opportunity may present itself to strike a deadly blow at the enemy's command structure.

At the end of the battle, each player scores 15 victory points if their opponent's **WARLORD** has been destroyed.


Critical
Critical
A2
A2
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
B1
B3
B3
B3
A3
A3
B3
A3
A3
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
B3
B3
B2
Attacker Entry Zone
B1
B1
B3
Defender Entry Zone
A4
A4
A2
A1
B1
Attacker Entry Zone
Defender Entry Zone
A1
A4
A4
A1
Sector A
Sector A
Sector B
Sector B
Sector C
Sector C
Sector D
Sector D